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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A New Mike Shayne Thriller

THE FULL MOON MEANS MURDER

by Brett Halliday

A Novelet

COYOTE AND

QUARTER MOON

by Bill Pronzini

and Jeffrey Wallmann

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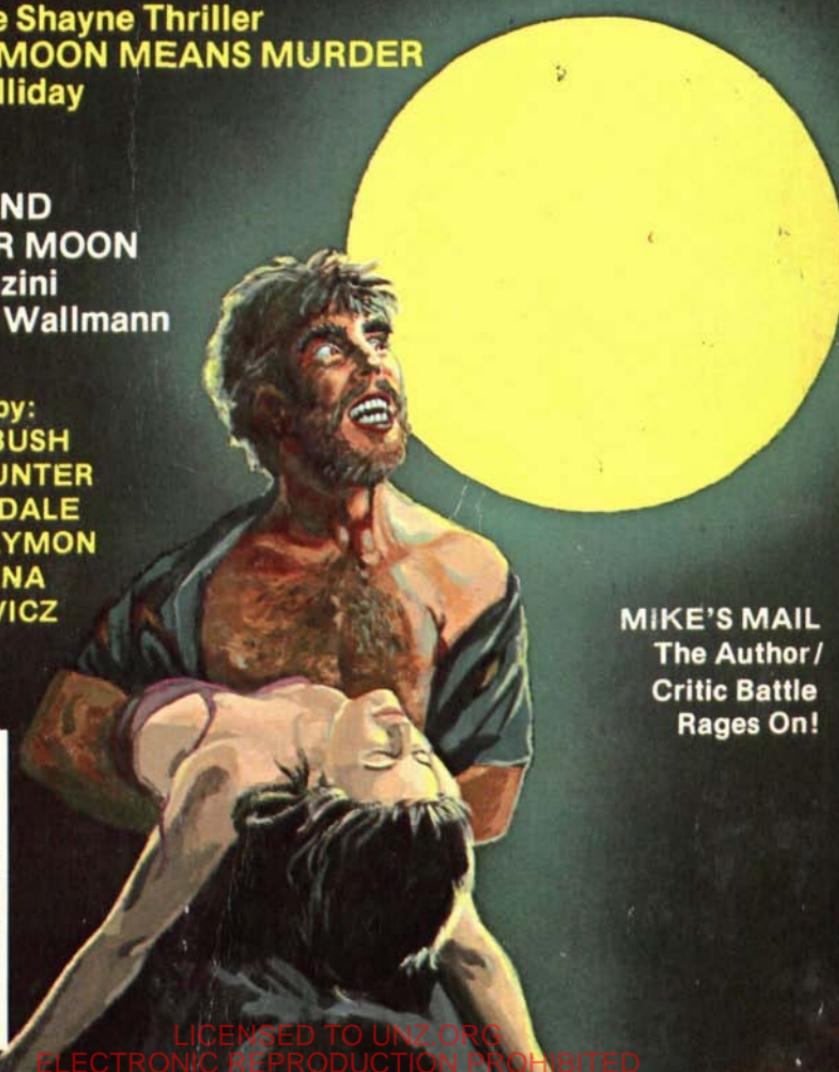
RICHARD LAYMON

RON MONTANA

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# MIKE SHAYNE

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

### THE FULL MOON MEANS MURDER

by Brett Halliday

*It came howling out of the night, a hairy creature with claws and fangs ready to rip apart its prey. Mike Shayne had to discover the werewolf's deadly secret — before he became its victim! . . . 6*

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Cover Painting by Merle Keller

# Mike Shayne Mystery Makers

BILL PRONZINI [and JEFFREY WALLMANN] (*Coyote and Quarter Moon*) says:

Jeff and I will have a collaborative novel DAY OF THE MOON, under our joint pseudonymn William Jeffrey, out from Tower Books late this year; it's the first in a series featuring Mafia troubleshooter and detective named Flagg. Second in the series, DEVIL WIND, due out sometime next year. Alone, I'll have MASQUES, "A Novel of Terror," from Arbor House in September; also, #7 in my "Nameless Detective" PI series, HOODWINK, due from St. Martin's in July. Wallmann, will have, among other solo efforts, a mystery novel from Tower called DIED YELLOW, to be published early in 1982. I live in San Francisco, Jeff lives in Eugene, Oregon, and we have large phone bills.

JOE R. LANSDALE (*The Soul Ghoul*) says:

East Texan all my life. Live in Nacogdoches, Texas, the oldest town in the state. Married to an attractive blonde named Karen who works for local fire department. Have Siberian (Suburban) Husky and an ugly cat. I've written non-fiction, detective, mystery, suspense, western and horror stories. Work has appeared in MSMM, Easy-riders, horror anthologies. In July issue of Twilight Zone; in Shadows 5 from Doubleday in 1982.

First novel, ACT OF LOVE, a thriller, out from Zebra Books. A western novel under a pen name will appear later this year from Tower. I've been known to hang out with such infamous characters as James Reasoner, Brett Halliday, Bill Crider, Jeff Banks, and Lew Shiner. Love the works of Bill Pronzini, Raymond Chandler, Ray Bradbury, William Goldman and Stephen King. I had plastic surgery done with my first advance check and am now a dead ringer for Lassie.

#### RON MONTANA (*Sleight of Hand*)

began writing in 1975. Since then he has sold five novels, including SIGN OF THE THUNDERBIRD (SF), THE CATHEDRAL OPTION (Mainstream), and ECHOES OF GLORY (Adventure). Forthcoming in 1981 is his first mystery, DEATH-CALLS and FACE IN THE SNOW (Mainstream). His first mystery story appeared in AHMM in 1981, and he has sold science fiction to Amazing, Alien Encounters, Microcosmic Tales, and has had short pieces in Readers Digest and Playboy.

#### C. BRUCE HUNTER (*Give Until It Stops Hurting*) tells us:

I was born and raised in North Carolina, where I've done some teaching (math and science) and a lot of selling (gifts and novelties, wholesale). I now live in Chapel Hill, which I believe has more f & sf writers per capita than any other place on earth. Previous publications include a whole slew of articles and book reviews, mostly in education magazines, and four short stories (with another half dozen stories forthcoming). The fiction is primarily mystery and fantasy. Hobbies include playing with my neighbor's dog (it's cheaper than having one of my own), golf, pool and gourmet cooking.

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# THE FULL MOON MEANS MURDER

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Werewolves in this day and age? Ridiculous, Mike Shayne decided. And yet there was some kind of creature wandering about, howling at the moon, attacking with fangs and claws. Maybe — just maybe — the idea wasn't so ridiculous after all.*

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NIGHT HAD FALLEN, AND A FULL, LAMBENT MOON was floating in the starry sky over Biscayne Bay. Its soft glow was washing down over the glittering panoply of lights that was Miami Beach. Farther to the north, in the exclusive residential district of Bal Harbour, a breeze was stirring the broad, leafy fronds of the palm trees that lined the streets. Behind broad, well-manicured lawns, huge houses with market values well into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, reposed peacefully. Porsches and Mercedes sat in driveways and in large garages. There were lights in some of the houses, but it was getting late, and many of the estates were dark. Frequent street lights kept the night at bay to a certain extent, but still there were dark patches of shadow, so deep that almost anything moving within them would have escaped notice by the occasional driver who passed by, cruising up and down these quiet streets. There were a few night owls abroad, people coming home from parties, police on desultory patrols. No one expected trouble on such a calm, warm, gentle night.

No one except Michael Shayne.

And he always expected trouble when he didn't know what he might be walking into.

SHAYNE WAS AT THE WHEEL OF HIS BUICK, piloting it through the rich streets in search of the house belonging to the man who had called him at his Second Avenue apartment earlier in the evening. He had started not to answer the call, but something inside him couldn't bear to sit and listen to a ringing phone, even when there was a steak on the table and a full tumbler of Martell waiting for him.

He had scooped up the receiver and growled, "Yeah?"

The voice that came back was male, and very agitated. "Is this Mike Shayne?"

"Yeah. Who's this?"

"I'm sorry to call you at your home, Mr. Shayne. You've got to help me. I don't know what I'm going to do — "

Shayne had taken a deep drag on the cigarette he was smoking and raised a bushy red eyebrow in exasperation. "You're going to slow down, that's what you're going to do," he snapped. "If you don't want me to hang up on you, that is. Now, who is this, and what do you want?"

"My name is Talbott Barron, Mr. Shayne, and I really need your help. I've heard that you're the best private detective in the area, and I — I think I'm in trouble."

"Could this wait until tomorrow morning, Mr. Barron?" Shayne asked. "I've got an office on Flagler Street, with a secretary and every-

thing, and I'm sure if you called her after nine o'clock, she'd be glad to set up an appointment for you to — ”

“No! You don't understand. I have to see you tonight! It's . . . it's a matter of life and death.”

Shayne had been in the private detective business most of his adult life, and even if he had tried to keep track of it, he would have lost count of the times he had heard the same thing over the years. People usually waited until they had what seemed like an earth-shaking problem before calling in a PI. They couldn't know that whatever the problem was, the investigator had probably seen hundreds of cases similar to it.

“I'm not coming anywhere until I know what the story is,” Shayne said flatly. “Why do you want to hire me?”

“It's a very delicate matter.”

“It always is.”

“I'm . . . afraid I'm being blackmailed, Mr. Shayne. And I just don't know how to handle it.”

The man sounded like he was about ready to cry. Some poor slob that had gotten himself into some sort of trouble, Shayne decided. He was about to ask what sort of hold the blackmailer had when Barron rushed on, “I'll tell you all about it if you'll come over to my house. We live in Bal Harbour; you won't have any trouble finding it.”

Shayne revised his earlier opinion. This Talbott Barron might be a slob, all right, Shayne had no evidence either way on that, but he was definitely not a poor one. As Barron recited the address, Shayne realized just how much money he was talking to. The street Barron mentioned was one of the wealthiest in the area.

Still, he had put in a long day clearing up the paperwork on a recently-concluded case. He said, “It's pretty late, Mr. Barron. We could talk first thing in the morning, though — ”

“It has to be tonight, don't you understand? If you don't come, someone might die!”

That sounded pretty extreme for a case of blackmail, Shayne thought. Judging from the near-hysterical tone of Barron's voice, the man was nudging pretty close to the edge. Someone needed to calm him down. Shayne was a detective, though, not a babysitter . . .

“Take it easy,” he heard himself saying. Something about Barron's anxiety must have touched him, he decided disgustedly. Regardless of the motivation, he said, “I guess I could take a quick drive over and hear what you've got to say.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Shayne!” Barron practically gushed. “I — I don't think I could have waited until morning. Once I had decided I had

to call someone in to help me, I was afraid I would back out on it if I didn't hurry. I may be too late as it is . . . Oh, God, I hope not . . . ”

There was no point in prolonging the conversation now, Shayne knew. Barron was too wound up in knots to make much sense on the phone. Settling him down and finding out the real story behind the call would have to wait for a face-to-face meeting.

Which would be coming up soon, Shayne knew. He had found the block he was looking for. The Barron house should be close to the middle of it, he thought, as he scanned the mailboxes that popped up in his headlights.

He spotted the name on a plate set into a rock-and-mortar column that also contained the house's mailbox. There was a high, thick hedge along the front of the estate, but it was broken by huge wrought-iron gates that were standing open. Shayne turned the Buick into the gap and started up a long macadam driveway that curved in front of the sprawling, low-slung house. There were lights on in the building, though they were all subdued.

There was a large porte cochere shielding the front doorway of the house, but a car was already parked underneath its shelter. There was no light on over the door, leaving the area in deep shadow. Shayne was a bit surprised. Talbott Barron was expecting him; there should have been more evidence of that fact.

He pulled the Buick up behind the other car, noting that it was a speedy-looking Corvette, and killed the engine. As he opened the door and stepped out, something moved in the darkness of the porte cochere. There were shrubs all around the entranceway, and Shayne's keen ears caught their rustle as something moved through them. He tensed, ready for any kind of surprise.

Or so he thought.

He wasn't ready for a nightmare.

IT LEAPED OUT OF THE DARKNESS AT HIM, a ragged howl escaping its throat. Shayne managed to utter a shocked "What the — " before the thing plowed into him.

The collision sent him staggering backwards. There was harsh growling right in his face, and nails raked at his face. Caught off-balance as he had been, it took him several seconds to halt his faltering steps and set his feet to return the blows.

Again the blood-curdling howl racketed in his ears. Shayne swung awkwardly, felt his fist thud into the body of his attacker. There was a pained yelp, as from a kicked dog. A fist flung wildly in the darkness

slammed into his face, blinding him for a moment, so that he couldn't follow up his brief advantage.

Hot breath panted into his face. Shayne tried to grapple with his opponent, hoping to get him down on the ground. But the man, if that's what it was, was too slippery. Shayne felt bare skin sliding under his fingers, skin made slick with sweat. The thing tore out of his grip and screamed again. Shayne threw another punch, but its target had already ducked away.

Whoever it was, it was turning tail and running now. Shayne thought about jerking his gun out from the holster underneath his coat, but he didn't want to start shooting without knowing just what the situation was. He started after his erstwhile ambusher at a run.

The gibbous moon was still pouring faint, soft-edged illumination down over the scene. Shayne couldn't see his quarry very clearly, as it darted in and out of shadows; but one thing he had seen for sure, when the thing first attacked him and now again as it fled from him.

It had the body of a man, but at the same time, it had the fanged, long-snouted head of a wolf . . . .

Shayne didn't know the grounds of the estate, and a few moments later, he had to admit that the thing had slipped away from him. He couldn't hear its running footsteps, nor its harsh breathing, anymore. And it had stopped howling as soon as it had decided that the big red-headed detective wasn't such easy prey after all. Shayne slowed to a trot, then stopped completely. Wheeling around, he started back toward the front of the house.

One thing was for sure. Talbott Barron, whoever he was, had some explaining to do.

**SHAYNE FOUND THE BUTTON FOR THE DOORBELL** and leaned a blunt finger on it heavily. He heard chimes going off somewhere in the big house, and a moment later, a light went on in the entrance hall just inside. Another one blazed into life over his head, and he presumed he was being inspected through a peephole by someone inside.

The door swung open, and a female voice said, "Yes? Can I help you?"

The woman standing just inside the door was very attractive, Shayne noted immediately. She was tall, with fine features, clear skin, luminous dark eyes, and long straight-hair the color of the midnight sky. She was wearing slacks and a plain blouse that was still made provocative by her lush figure.

"My name is Mike Shayne," he said. "I'm here to see Talbott Barron."

He thought the girl paled slightly at the mention of Barron's name. She asked softly, "You had an appointment with my brother?"

"That's right. He called me earlier and asked me to come over."

"I wish he was here to see you, Mr. Shayne, I really do," the girl said. "You see, I don't have any idea where Talbott is, and I'm worried about him." She shook her head, seeming suddenly flustered. "Won't you come in? I'm sure it'll be all right if you wait for him."

Shayne stepped into the foyer, his feet sinking into the thick carpet inside. There were original oil paintings on the walls, and the very air in the place almost smelled like money. The girl went on, "I'm Rebecca Barron, Mr. Shayne, Talbott's sister. I'll take you to his study; I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you waited for him there."

As Shayne followed Rebecca Barron down a long hall, he wondered just what the hell was going on at this opulent estate. Surely the girl had heard all the commotion outside. It would have been impossible not to hear that infernal howling . . .

"Miss Barron," he said, "I was just attacked outside when I arrived, and I was wondering — "

"Attacked?" she whispered, turning quickly to face him. "Oh, no. Did you see — I mean, do you know who — "

Shayne shook his head. "It was too dark to see much of anything," he lied. "Could you tell me what's going on around here, Miss Barron? Do you have any idea why your brother called me and asked me to come over?"

Rebecca Barron shook her pretty head. "I'm afraid not," she said, and somehow Shayne knew that she was lying, too. She was too worried about something to be telling the truth. "Talbott left the house about half an hour ago. He stormed out and didn't say where he was going. That's not like him, Mr. Shayne, you have to believe me — "

Shayne didn't believe anything of the sort. Something bad was going on here, and this girl had at least an inkling of what it was. Before he could ask any more questions, though, she had hurried on to the door she had been heading for originally. She opened it and said, "You can wait in here. I'll tell Talbott you're here as soon as he returns. Would you like a drink?"

"Martell, if you've got it," Shayne said automatically. He didn't want to go on into the study until the girl did; what he wanted was to keep her where he could keep an eye on her.

He didn't have to make the decision, though. The front door opened again, and there was a heavy step as someone came inside. Shayne looked back over his shoulder, and his eyes narrowed in surprise as he saw who it was.

The man was of medium height, slightly heavyset. His brown hair was disheveled, and his eyes behind their thick glasses were wide and staring. There was a strange glint in them as the man looked down the hall at Shayne and Rebecca.

"Talbott!" the girl cried out. "What happened to you?"

Talbott Barron was a mess. His shirt was hanging out, and only two buttons held it closed. The others appeared to have been ripped loose. His pants were wrinkled and stained, as if he had been rolling around on the ground. He started down the hall with shaky steps.

Rebecca ran to him but he pushed past her. Fixing Shayne with an intense, almost hypnotized look, he said, "Are you Mike Shayne?"

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. "And I want to know what's going on here."

"Go on into the study," Barron muttered. To his sister, he said, "Leave us alone, Rebecca. This is personal."

"But, Talbott — "

Barron glanced back at his sister, and the savage, harried look on his face was enough to silence her. He stepped into the study, and Shayne followed him in, shutting the door behind them.

"What's it all about, Barron?" Shayne grated. "Was that you who jumped me outside?"

"Jumped you?" Barron asked distractedly. "I don't remember that — but then I don't remember most things anymore . . ." He shook his head. There was pain in his eyes. "So hard to think . . . Thank you for coming, Mr. Shayne. I'll get myself pulled back together here in a minute . . ."

"You said something on the phone about blackmail?" Shayne prodded.

"That's right." Barron sat down wearily in a chair behind a huge mahogany desk. "I'm supposed to pay someone one hundred thousand dollars to suppress something. I'll pay you twenty-five thousand to take care of it for me."

"What do you mean, take care of it?"

Barron shrugged. "You know. Whatever it is you private eyes do. Scare the guy off somehow."

Shayne suppressed the disgusted snort he felt in reaction to Barron's words. He said, "It's not quite that simple. What are you being blackmailed over?"

Barron looked up sharply. "I can't tell you that. Then *you'd* have it on me, too."

"You've got to trust me if I'm going to help you, Barron," Shayne said curtly. "Tell me what it's about, or find yourself somebody else."

"All right." A low laugh welled up from Barron's throat, and Shayne thought he heard more than a hint of madness in the eerie sound. "I'm being blackmailed because of a murder I committed. A murder I committed during the full moon . . . when I was a werewolf."

## II

SHAYNE STARED AT TALBOTT BARRON FOR A LONG MOMENT, then leaned over, placing his palms flat on the desk. With a glare, he said, "You've picked the wrong guy for this cute little joke, Barron. You may think it's funny to run around in a Halloween mask and howl at the moon, but I won't be the patsy, understand?" He straightened up and started to turn on his heel. All he wanted to do now was get out of this place.

"I knew you wouldn't understand," Barron said, despair and resignation mixing in his voice. "You have every right to be mad at me, Mr. Shayne, and I don't blame you for feeling the way you do. If someone else told me the same thing, I'd think they were crazy, too. But I swear to you, it's true."

Shayne glanced back over his shoulder. Barron was staring down at his desk, as if the burden on him was too heavy for him to even lift his head. The man could have been acting, Shayne knew, but something made him pause for a moment. He asked, "Do you remember jumping me outside just after I got here?"

Barron shook his head. "I — I'm afraid I don't remember anything for the last hour or so. In fact, one of the last things I do remember is calling you and asking you to come here. I was hoping that I could control the change . . . until you got here."

Shayne reluctantly turned around and sat down in a chair in front of the desk. He took out a cigarette and lit it, then smoked silently for a moment as he stroked his jaw with a thumbnail. Finally, he said, "Look, you know you don't really turn into some kind of wolfman, don't you?"

Barron's head lifted then, and he said, "No, I don't know that at all. How much do you know about lycanthropy, Mr. Shayne?"

"Not much," Shayne grunted. "Only what I've seen in movies."

Barron snorted. "The movies are full of nonsense. Curses and gypsy women and the like. No, Mr. Shayne, lycanthropy is real, and I am a victim of it. Lord knows why it afflicted me. It can't be hereditary; my father has always been perfectly normal. But for the last several months, I've been experiencing strange blackouts . . . and they were always during nights of the full moon, like tonight. I was worried about

it, of course; but I never thought . . . never dreamed . . . Well, until the pictures came, I had no idea what had been happening."

Shayne sat forward, saying, "Pictures?"

Barron opened the middle drawer of the desk and took out a large, flat manila envelope. He handed it across to Shayne.

Shayne unfastened the flap and opened the envelope. There were several eight-by-ten photos inside, he saw immediately, sliding them out and casting his grey eyes over them.

The craggy red brows over his eyes lifted. He stared down at the pictures, trying to decide whether or not he was imagining things. He looked back up at Talbott Barron. The man looked worried and tense, but basically he reminded Shayne of a big, clumsy dog. Under different circumstances, Shayne decided, Talbott Barron would project only an impression of mild inoffensiveness.

But the man in these pictures looked like a complete, raving, homicidal maniac.

It was Barron, there was no doubt of that. Even though the pictures appeared to have been taken at night, using only the moon and stars for illumination, they were plain enough to make an identification of Barron positive. The photographer must have used a fast lens and a fast film, Shayne knew. In the pictures, Barron was glaring at the camera, his face twisted in a snarl. His hair was tangled and sticking out at all angles, and he didn't have his glasses on. His shirt was in tatters. He was holding his hands up, and Shayne saw that the fingers were hooked, looking for all the world like claws. There were dark stains on the fingers, and similar patches of something smeared around Barron's mouth.

His feet were bare, Shayne saw. And lying on the ground at those feet was a body.

It was a woman, a young woman who might have been beautiful at one time. Now her face looked like a death mask, which is what it probably was. There was blood all over her features, and her body was sprawled limply on the ground. Her clothes were ripped to shreds, exposing a great deal of her flesh, but there was nothing erotic about the image. Everywhere Shayne looked, there was blood . . .

**ALL THE PICTURES WERE SIMILAR**, the positions of the two subjects staying constant. Talbott Barron became more agitated in each picture, as if he was outraged at the photographer being there. Shayne glanced up sharply at the man across the desk from him, then slid the photos back in their envelope and tossed the package back on the desk.

He said slowly, "Do you remember anything like is in those pictures happening?"

Barron shook his head. "No. I swear I don't. But I think I know *when* it happened. It was on the night of the full moon last month. I remember . . . the next morning . . . after I had been blacked out the night before . . . I woke up with my clothes torn like that. And there was . . . there was blood on my face, and on my hands. But I wasn't cut anywhere. It had to be someone else's blood. Didn't it, Mr. Shayne?"

"It looked like that girl had lost plenty," Shayne mused. "You said you didn't know what was happening during your blackouts until the pictures came. Did they come in the mail, or did a messenger bring them?"

"They were in the mail. They came a week ago. I — I was shocked, as you can well imagine. I had no idea, no idea at all. . . . Well, once they came, I knew that the worst had happened. Since then, I've just been racking my brain trying to decide what to do about it."

"What about the envelope they came in?"

Barron took another slightly larger envelope out of the desk. His name and address were printed on it in block letters, and there was no return address. The postmark told Shayne that it had been mailed at a suburban Miami post office. He opened it, looked inside, saw nothing.

"What about the note?" he asked. "There must have been a note with the picture."

"Oh, yes, there was a note." Barron took a piece of paper out of the drawer and handed it over to Shayne. "I know I've probably ruined any fingerprints that are on it already. But I'm not used to handling things like this, Mr. Shayne. I was so shaken up by those awful pictures that I haven't been thinking straight the last few days."

Shayne scanned the note quickly. It was printed in the same block letters that had been on the envelope, and it said "*Barron — One hundred thousand dollars, or the pictures go to the police. You must pay for the murdering monster inside you. We will be watching you. Put the money inside an ice chest and throw it off the County Causeway exactly at midnight. You have until the 20th.*

Shayne looked up. "The 20th is tomorrow night."

"I know," Barron said wearily.

"Do you intend to pay?"

"No!" The vehemence of Barron's answer surprised Shayne. "I have the money, that's not it. But I can't pay someone to conceal evidence of a crime I've committed. I — I don't know what I was thinking when I called you. I had some crazy idea that a private eye could fix things like this. Huh! Crazy describes all of my ideas, I guess.

No, since I've got proof now that I am crazy, there's only one thing to do. I'm going to turn myself and these pictures over to the police."

"Wait a minute," Shayne said. "I thought you said a few minutes ago that you believe you actually turn into a werewolf."

Barron smiled, and there was more sadness in it than Shayne had seen in a long time. "Anybody who believes such a thing *is* crazy, right? Either way, Mr. Shayne, I deserve to be locked up."

Shayne leaned back in his chair and frowned. Without him even knowing it, his hand strayed up to pull gently on his earlobe. Talbott Barron was a severely disturbed individual, that was for sure. The things he had said, and the incident outside the house, which he didn't even remember, were proof enough of that. But that didn't mean that he was necessarily a murderer.

"I've got another question, Barron. Do you recognize the girl in the pictures?"

A shiver ran through Barron's body at the question. He reached up and mopped away some of the fine sheen of perspiration that covered his forehead. "It's hard to say," he began hesitantly. "She's so . . . so messed up and all, all that blood . . . But I'm pretty sure, Mr. Shayne, that I never saw her before in my life."

Shayne reached out with one long-arm and snagged the envelope containing the pictures again. He took them out and studied them some more. While the camera had been focused on Barron and the body at his feet, it was still possible to make out some of the background. There were trees, or rather, low scrubby bushes, behind the two figures. The ground was mostly gravel, and behind Barron, it sloped off. Shayne suddenly realized that they were on the edge of some sort of embankment. The graveled surface was probably the shoulder of a road, and whoever had taken the pictures had probably stood on the road itself.

"You're not turning yourself in to the cops," he told Barron suddenly. "Let's face it, you show them those pictures and tell them you killed the girl while you thought you were a werewolf, they're going to roll around on the floor for a while laughing, then give you a hard time because they'll think you're pulling their legs. You don't want that, and it wouldn't do anybody any good in the long run."

"What can I do, then?" Barron almost wailed.

"Go through with the drop," Shayne said flatly. "Heave the ice chest off the causeway just like you're supposed to. Only don't put the money in it, weight it down with something else, like newspapers. It'll be interesting to see who picks it up."

"I don't understand. You mean you're going to help me?"

Shayne grinned. "I never had a werewolf for a client before. It might turn out to be interesting."

### III

"LYCANTHROPY?" TIMOTHY ROURKE ASKED. "Why the hell are you interested in lycanthropy, Mike?"

Shayne was straddling a backwards-turned chair in the City Room of the Miami *Daily News* the next morning. Rourke, the paper's top reporter and feature writer, had his feet propped on his desk, one of them beating out an aimless tattoo on the side of an electronic VDT unit. The hum from the things filled the room.

"Just humor me, Tim," Shayne said, blowing cigarette smoke into a slanting shaft of sunlight coming in through the secondfloor windows. "After all, you owe me one."

"I don't know how you figure that," Rourke groused. "You and I must keep score differently. Still, though, you got the Justice Department to break down and give me the story on the Troy Dalton thing. I might just cop a Pulitzer for *that* series, Mike."

"I hope so. Now, how about the werewolves?"

Rourke put his feet down on the floor and pulled open a drawer in his desk, taking out a thick book. "Let's see What Mr. Webster has to say on the subject. *Lycanthropy — a form of mental disorder in which the patient imagines himself to be a wolf. In folklore, the magical power to transform oneself or another into a wolf.* Other than that, all I know is to stay away from Lon Chaney Jr. during a full moon. For, even a man who is pure of heart — "

"All right, all right. I get the picture. You think it's a joke. I'm not sure I blame you."

Rourke shrugged. "I'm sure there are people who are actually affected by some sort of mental thing that makes them think they're werewolves. But I've never known any of them. The Baltic countries seem to have a corner on the wolfman market, though. I mean, when was the last time you saw Maria Ouspenskya in Miami?"

Shayne bit back a curse and started to stand up. Rourke motioned him back down and went on, "Okay, Mike. No more cracks, okay? It's just that I don't know anything about the subject. I'll try to find out for you if you want me to."

"Thanks," Shayne nodded. "I'd appreciate it. And if you've got a few minutes, I could use some info about another case I'm working on."

"Shoot. Deadline's a long way off."

"What can you tell me about a brother and sister named Talbott and Rebecca Barron? They live in Bal Harbour, which means they're pretty well off, of course."

Rourke massaged his jaw as he thought. "Names are familiar," he said. "I can't place them, though. What say we try the morgue?"

THE MORGUE OF THE *DAILY NEWS* WAS IN THE BASEMENT of the building, and Shayne and Rourke boarded an elevator that was going down. As they rode, Shayne thought back over the rest of his conversation with Talbott Barron the night before.

It had taken some convincing to persuade Barron to go through with the plan set up by the blackmailer, but finally he had agreed. Shayne didn't tell him, but during the course of their conversation, he had become more and more sure that Talbott Barron had killed no one.

There was something wrong with the whole thing. Shayne couldn't put his finger on what it was, but the vague feeling he had was enough for him to go on, until he was proven wrong. This business smelled of a set-up, a frame to extort a big bundle of money from Barron. The girl in the pictures had looked dead, all right, but Shayne knew how easy it was to fake the most gruesome effects. A skilled make-up man could do literal wonders.

Barron had plenty of money, that was obvious from the offhand way he had mentioned he had the hundred grand. It looked to Shayne as if someone was trying to take advantage of a very confused, troubled man. Barron was going to need the services of a good psychiatrist, sooner or later, but at the moment, he might be better off with a big redheaded shamus looking after his interests.

And, looney or not, the ten thousand dollar retainer check that Barron had written out before Shayne left the estate was good. Shayne had already confirmed that, as soon as the banks opened.

He hadn't seen Rebecca Barron as he had left the house, assuring Talbott that they would get to the bottom on this thing. From the way she had acted when Shayne first arrived at the house, he suspected that she knew of her brother's mental condition and was ashamed of it. Shayne couldn't really blame her for that.

He and Rourke dug into the files of back issues of the *News* stored in the morgue, and within a half hour, Shayne knew quite a bit more about the Barrons. Their names popped up most often on the financial pages, but they were in the society pages, too, as befitting two very wealthy young people. There were even some pictures of them, attending charity balls and other functions. Talbott looked uncomfortable in his tuxedo, but Rebecca was a vision of loveliness in her pictures,

always decked out in stunning gowns.

Shayne was more interested in finding out their background, though. They had been in Miami for six months, having moved south after the death of their father, Fleming Barron. The elder Barron had been the founder and president of Barron Condiments and Spices. It had been, and still was, a lucrative company, having earned Fleming Barron a considerable fortune during his lifetime. That money, and the company, now belonged to his two children. Shayne noted with interest that the spice company had a branch office and a packing plant in the Miami area. The business manager of the firm, he found from a lengthy article in the *New's* business section, was a man named Jeremy Whitson, who had come to Florida from the Northeast at the same time as the Barrons. The Florida branch had been in operation for several years, but now the firm's headquarters were being gradually phased from up north to here in Miami. A grim smile tugged at Shayne's mouth as he realized that Talbott, who thought himself to be a werewolf, was living off the proceeds of a company that sold garlic, among other things.

As Shayne looked over the information that he and Rourke had found, the reporter said suspiciously, "Are you working for these people, Mike? Are you sure they don't have anything to do with all those werewolf questions?"

"Two completely different cases," Shayne lied smoothly. It wouldn't do to spill the whole story to Rourke, not until after the midnight drop anyway.

"Yeah, well, I want an exclusive when you get ready to talk, you know that. I don't know why you have to be so damned closemouthed."

"For the same reason you give your sources a promise of confidentiality," Shayne said. "You know I'll give you every break I can, Tim. Thanks for helping me. And if you do come up with anything more about lycanthropy, give Lucy a call, okay? I don't know for sure where I'll be."

"Will do. Though sometimes I don't know why . . . "

Shayne grinned and left Rourke to replace the papers they had been looking through. He stopped at a phone booth in the lobby to look up the address of the spice company's local office, then pointed the nose of his Buick in that direction.

THE PACKING PLANT WAS A LOW, SPRAWLING COMPLEX on the outskirts of Miami, with a two-story office building in front of it. Shayne found a place to park in the nearly-full lot and strolled into the office building.

A pretty blond receptionist smiled up at him and asked, "Can I help you, sir?"

"I'd like to see Jeremy Whitson, if he's in," Shayne said. "My name is Mike Shayne, and I'm here on personal business for Mr. Talbott Barron."

The girl looked surprised, but he said, "Thank you, sir. I'll buzz Mr. Whitson's office and see if he's available."

Shayne stood and waited while she talked in low tones over the phone on her desk. After a few moments of the whispered conversation, the girl hung up and said to him, "You can go right up, Mr. Shayne. Mr. Whitson is in Suite A201."

"Thanks," Shayne nodded. There was an elevator on the far wall of the building, but he disregarded it and took a broad staircase instead.

He found Suite A201 almost directly at the top of the stairs. There was a small sign on the door of it that gave Whitson's name and nothing more. Shayne opened the door and stepped into a small anteroom.

Another attractive woman was behind a desk here, and she looked up at him with a smile that was a twin to the blonde's. She said, "Mr. Shayne? You can go right in. Mr. Whitson is expecting you."

Shayne nodded to her on his way past the desk, then went through the door on the other side of the room. As he stepped into the inner office, he heard soft music coming from concealed speakers.

There was a large desk sitting in front of a wall that was mostly glass. The man behind it hit a switch, killing the music. He stood up, extending a hand, and said, "Mr. Shayne? I'm Jeremy Whitson."

Shayne shook hands, noting Whitson's firm grip. The business manager of the firm was tall, his brown eyes nearly on a level with Shayne's grey ones. He wore a conservative suit, and wore it well. He was in his fifties, Shayne would have guessed from the lines of his still-handsome face and the silver in his thick brown hair and moustache. Whitson was a man who carried his age well; he moved with the grace of an athlete, which meant a lot of tennis or swimming or both.

"Please, have a seat," Whitson went on. "What can I do for you? I believe you said Talbott sent you over?"

"Not exactly," Shayne said, sinking down into a comfortable chair in front of the desk. "He doesn't know I'm here right now, but I am working for him."

Whitson resumed his own seat and propped a finger along one cheek as he regarded Shayne. "I feel like I should recognize you, Mr.

Shayne. Have we done business before?"

Shayne shook his head. "We're not in the same line of work. I'm a private investigator."

"Of course!" Whitson sat up, losing some of his casualness. "I've seen your picture in the paper and read about you. You said you're working for Talbott? What in the world would Talbott need with a private detective?"

"I'm afraid I can't say right now," Shayne replied. "Do you mind answering some questions of mine, though?"

Whitson shook his head. "Not at all. Would you mind if I called Talbott first, though? I'd like to be sure it's all right with him before I spill all of the company's secrets."

Shayne smiled thinly. "I don't take industrial espionage jobs. But go ahead and call him. I don't mind."

Whitson picked up his phone and asked the secretary to get Talbott Barron for him. Shayne glanced around the office as he waited.

The place wasn't fancy, but it was plenty comfortable. There was a strange dual air of functionality and elegance about it, both of them existing at the same time. It was a place where a man could get a lot of work done but still have a fairly pleasant time doing it.

Whitson said abruptly into the phone, "Talbott? This is Jeremy. There's a man here named Mike Shayne. He's a private detective, and he says he's working for you. Shall I tell him all of our deep dark secrets? Oh? Sure. Thanks, Talbott."

Whitson hung up and smiled at Shayne. "Talbott says to cooperate fully with you, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure you understand why I wanted to call him, though."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "My questions aren't really about the company, Mr. Whitson. How long have you known Talbott and Rebecca Barron?"

"All of their lives, practically. All of Rebecca's, certainly. I went to work for Fleming Barron twenty-seven years ago, and Rebecca's twenty-six. Talbott was still just a little thing when I started with the firm."

"You know a lot about them, then." Shayne's words were more of a statement than a question.

"Oh, of course. I watched them grow up, and I've been handling their own personal finances for years, as well as being the company's business manager."

Shayne quirked an eyebrow. "Talbott didn't tell me you handled their money, too. I wonder what else Talbott didn't tell me."

Whitson frowned slightly. "I'm not sure what you mean, Mr. Shayne."

"Do you know of anything . . . unusual in Talbott's past? Or in Rebecca's for that matter?"

Whitson frowned deeper. "And what do you mean by unusual?"

"Some kind of mental disturbance," Shayne said. "Something that might explain why Talbott is coming unhinged now."

THERE WAS A MOMENT OF SILENCE AS WHITSON regarded Shayne, a trace of anger glowing in his eyes now. He finally said, "I don't think I like your insinuation, Mr. Shayne. I know Talbott said he had hired you, but that doesn't give you the right to snoop in things that are over and done with."

Shayne sat forward, sensing that Whitson had something specific in mind. "What something are you talking about, that's over and done with?"

"You mean Talbott didn't tell you himself?" Whitson sounded disbelieving.

"You tell me, if you don't mind," Shayne said. "Talbott did ask you to cooperate with me."

"And I hope he hasn't made a mistake. Very well. About three years ago, Talbott had a . . . problem. The doctors called it a nervous breakdown. He's always been high-strung, though he hides it most of the time. He's been fine ever since he got out of the hospital."

Talbott Barron had said nothing about a nervous breakdown the night before. Shayne considered quickly. There might well be other things the young man had lied about.

"What did he do when he had this breakdown?" Shayne asked.

Whitson seemed to be embarrassed. He said slowly, "Talbott went through several stages in his problem. He always imagined he was someone, or something, else, though. He claimed that he was Jack the Ripper for a while, and he wanted the police to come and arrest him. And then he was a vampire, or thought he was, at any rate, and he kept talking about drinking blood. It was very unpleasant to deal with him, I assure you. All of his fantasies seemed to be morbid and violent. His father was already in poor health by then, and I know how hard it all was on Fleming. And on Rebecca, too, of course. We were all glad that Talbott's mother had passed away years ago, before he developed any signs of being disturbed."

Shayne felt like shaking his head in amazement. Barron had conveniently omitted mentioning any of this. It was easy to see that the man needed professional help with his problems.

But Shayne still thought the murder rap was a set-up. It was just too convenient. He said, "I suppose the doctors finally decided Talbott was cured?"

"They thought he would be able to function in society again." Whitson leaned forward, concern etched on his face. "What's happened, Mr. Shayne? Is Talbott in some sort of trouble?"

"I don't think so," Shayne said, "but that's what I'm trying to find out for sure. If you're an old friend of the family, I suppose you've been to the Barron estate since they moved down here."

"Of course. Many times."

"How many servants do they have?"

"Just two. A husband and wife, Kevin and Mildred Scott. Kevin handles the yard work and the cars, Mildred does the cooking and the cleaning." Whitson shook his head. "I'm sorry to hear that Talbott may be having trouble again. I can give you the name of the doctor who handled his case up north — "

Shayne shook his head. "That won't be necessary right now. I appreciate your willingness to help, though. It's a good thing Talbott has friends around him."

"Yes," Whitson said solemnly. "He's a good kid, always has been. It's a shame he can't seem to get straightened out . . ."

Shayne stood up and shook hands with Whitson again. "Thanks for your time," he said. "Maybe I'll be seeing you again."

"Feel free to call on me any time, Mr. Shayne. Talbott and Rebecca are almost like my own children, so I don't want to see them in trouble."

Shayne nodded and left the office. As he strode back out to his car, he thought over what Whitson had told him. He wished that Talbott had admitted his past mental problems. Concealing them as he had done only made Shayne suspect he wasn't telling the whole truth about the current situation. Still, he hadn't made up the pictures of himself and the girl. They existed, they weren't any figment of a warped imagination. And somebody had written that note demanding a hundred thousand dollars. Shayne hoped to know who that somebody was before the sun came up again. He had a feeling that if he could spot whoever picked up the ice chest, he would have all the other answers.

The next thing on the agenda was a meeting with Talbott to finalize the details of the drop. Shayne wanted to be sure Barron knew exactly what to do. If he got spooked and didn't follow the blackmailer's instructions, he could blow Shayne's surveillance of the scene all to hell. As Shayne piloted the Buick back toward Bal Harbour, he considered

what he had learned so far.

If Talbott was being framed for the killing, being made to think he was a lycanthrope, then the job would require an inside man. So far, there seemed to be only four candidates for that job — Kevin and Mildred Scott, Jeremy Whitson, and Rebecca Barron herself. Whitson admitted that he had been to the estate many times. The Scotts were an unknown quantity. And Rebecca might have had the best opportunity of all to manipulate her brother's psyche. Shayne sighed and lit a cigarette. He always felt a little ill at ease trying to deal with other people's heads. He was a shamus, not a shrink . . . .

He pulled into the driveway of the estate and started up toward the porte cochere. There was no car parked there today. He resolved to meet Kevin Scott and ask whose car had been there the night before. It probably belonged to Talbott or Rebecca, but it wouldn't hurt to check it out.

He stopped at the front door and swung the door of the Buick open. The place was quiet this morning, and bright sunlight washed over the grounds. Nobody would be jumping out unexpectedly at him now.

Shayne dropped the butt of his cigarette, lowered his head as he ground it out with his heel —

And a bullet whapped through the air, only inches from his ear.

#### IV

SHAYNE THREW HIMSELF FORWARD INSTINCTIVELY, seeking the meager protection of the still-open car door. Another slug kicked up gravel next to his feet.

He jerked his pistol loose from its holster as he crouched behind the door, his eyes scanning the surroundings quickly and carefully. The shots seemed to be coming from somewhere to the left of the house, where shrubbery and trees grew fairly thickly. As Shayne looked for the source of the attack, he again felt the wind of a bullet passing by his head. He cursed under his breath and dove back into the front seat of the car.

Rolling awkwardly across the seat, he kicked the door open on the passenger side and vaulted out again. From this new angle, he saw a flash as the sniper fired again, and he sent two quick shots back in that direction.

He didn't know if either of his bullets had hit anything or not, but the shots from the trees stopped coming. Shayne knelt beside the fender of the Buick for a long moment, debating whether or not it was safe to come out yet. The sniper could be trying to wait him out, and he

didn't want to go charging into a slug. On the other hand, whoever it was could be getting away even now. Shayne took a deep breath and came out from behind the car in a bent-over run.

He sprinted toward the corner of the house, expecting at any second to hear the crack of another shot, but none came. As he charged around the building, his keen ears picked up the sounds of someone running in the same direction. The sniper was fleeing, Shayne decided, and the noise of crashing through shrubbery was coming from the back of the house.

Shayne headed in that direction, his long legs covering the distance quickly. The estate was a fairly large one, comprising several acres, and as the big detective reached the back of the house, he caught a brief glimpse of someone ducking through the thick trees at the rear of the estate.

There were other estates on the far side of the trees, Shayne knew, and if the would-be killer reached them, he could probably escape easily, slipping away in the maze of streets that wound through the neighborhood. And if he happened to have a car parked over there, Shayne would have no chance at all of catching him.

Those thoughts ran through Shayne's head in a split-second, and then he was sprinting toward where he had seen his quarry disappear. He hadn't been able to tell much about who he was chasing, only that it had appeared to be a man. Shayne wasn't even sure of that, though. He ran into the trees, slowing his pace slightly so that he wouldn't collide with anything. There was a small, shed-like aluminum building set in the trees, probably a storage building for tools and gardening equipment, he decided. He had just started to trot past it when he caught the flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye.

Shayne jerked his head to the side, but the reaction came a fraction of a second too late. Something hard, probably the butt of the rifle that had been fired at him, clipped him on the temple.

He kept going forward, carried by his momentum, but he was staggering now, trying to make the lightshow in his head settle down. His feet were going out from under him, and try as he might, he couldn't keep his balance. Shayne went down, vaguely conscious of someone running past him and disappearing into the brush.

It took only moments for his head to clear, but those moments had been plenty long enough for his attacker to get away. Flight would have been the man's only concern, now that the gunshots must have alerted the neighborhood. Shayne counted himself lucky that all he had gotten was a bump on the head. He massaged the goose egg

gingerly for a second, then holstered his gun and started back toward the house.

**THERE WAS NO ONE IN SIGHT AT THE BACK** of the big building, but as Shayne came around the corner to the front again, he saw Talbott Barron standing beside the Buick, a puzzled, worried look on his broad face. When he saw Shayne, he burst out, "Mr. Shayne! What happened? I heard something and came out here to look around, and I saw your car but you weren't here with it. Were those gunshots I heard?"

"They sure as hell were," Shayne told him. "Somebody opened up on me with a rifle as soon as I got out of the car. I chased him around the house, but I wasn't quite careful enough. Whoever it was clouted me on the head and knocked me down long enough to get away."

"How awful!" Talbott exclaimed. "Are you all right? Shall I call a doctor?"

"No, I'm okay," Shayne said, shaking his head. "Actually, I'm kind of glad it happened."

"Glad? Why?"

"Because it proves to me that what I suspected was right. Somebody doesn't want me getting involved with you, Barron. They're afraid I'll find the proof that their little blackmail scheme is nothing but a hoax."

He wasn't completely sure of that last statement, but he saw no need in worrying Barron any more at this point. Ever since he had found out about the previous mental breakdown, he had been wondering if it was just possible that Barron really had killed the girl in the pictures. That might be, but even if he had, someone else had to have taken those pictures, and that someone was now blackmailing him. Better to get that situation cleared up first, Shayne decided, then deal with the possibility that Barron might be a murderer. The young man still didn't strike Shayne as the type to kill anyone, but he knew better than to rely completely on outward impressions.

"Well, if you're sure you're all right . . ." Talbott was saying. "Let's go on in the house. Do you still think we should go through with things tonight?"

"More than ever," Shayne answered as they stepped into the house. "That's why I'm here, to tell you exactly what I've got planned."

They went into Talbott's study, where they had met the night before, and took seats on either side of the desk. Shayne lit a cigarette and crossed his legs, looking at Talbott speculatively. The young man looked about half-a-step away from crawling the walls. His eyes were wide and staring, and he was chewing nervously on already-gnawed

fingernails. As Shayne watched, he saw Talbott bite them down to the quick, drawing blood. Talbott didn't seem to notice.

"Are you sure you can handle this, Barron?" Shayne asked, abruptly and sharply.

Talbott's head jerked up. "I — I think I can," he said hesitantly, and he didn't sound sure of himself at all. "You want me to do just like the note said, right?"

"Right. Only you don't put the money in the ice chest." Shayne sat back. "This is the way I figure it. Whoever is going to make the pick-up will be waiting on the Bay, in a boat with its running lights off, probably. The ice chest will float, and when he sees you toss it off the bridge, he'll give you time to leave and then go fish it out. I'll be watching, though, and I should be able to see who it is."

"How will you be able to tell? I mean, it'll be dark —"

"There's equipment that'll let me see in the dark. I'll be hidden somewhere around there, someplace where I can keep an eye on the whole area around the causeway. Then I'll follow whoever picks up the ice chest, close in when I get the chance, and we've got our black-mailer. Then we'll find out the real truth about those photographs of you."

Shayne was watching Talbott carefully as he spoke, wondering if he would get any rise out of the man with that last sentence. Talbott's expression of anxiety didn't change, though. He had already looked plenty worried.

"Where . . . where will you be hiding, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne shook his head. "I won't tell you that. The last thing we need is you watching my lookout spot so intently that the pickup man gets suspicious."

Talbott nodded. "I guess I can understand that. I just hope I can carry it all off."

"You can," Shayne assured him. "Where's your sister? I wanted to talk to her again."

"She's gone out," Talbott said. "I think she was going shopping, but she should be back soon. Why did you want to talk to her?"

"Does she have any idea what's going on around here?"

Talbott shook his head emphatically. "No, and she's not going to. She's my baby sister, Mr. Shayne, and I have to protect her as much as I can."

Rebecca Barron had looked pretty mature and capable to Shayne, but he supposed he could understand Talbott's protectiveness. He didn't dwell on the subject, asked instead, "Do you have any servants here? Seems like a big place for just the two of you to take care of."

"Oh, yes, we have two people working here, Kevin and Mildred Scott. Wonderful people. Would you like to meet them?"

Shayne stood up. "Yeah. I would like to meet them."

Talbott started to get up, then paused suddenly and looked at Shayne. After a moment, he said, "I understand now. You think someone who lives here has something to do with my troubles."

"It's a reasonable assumption," Shayne said carefully. He could see that Talbott didn't like the idea.

"Maybe so, but I just can't believe it. Kevin and Mildred have worked for us ever since we came to Florida, and they've been just fine."

"I'd like to talk to them anyway," Shayne said.

Talbott sighed. "Of course. You're the detective, Mr. Shayne."

THEY LEFT THE STUDY, GOING DOWN THE HALL toward the rear of the house, Talbott in the lead. As they came into a large kitchen, Shayne saw a man and woman sitting at a table. They were in their middle thirties, he would have guessed, the man rawboned and sandy-haired, the woman dark-haired and wearing glasses, with a plump but still attractive face.

Talbott said, "Kevin, Mildred, I'd like for you to meet Mr. Shayne. He'd like to ask you a couple of questions."

Shayne wished Talbott hadn't said that, but he saw from the look that Kevin Scott gave him that it really didn't matter. There was recognition in the man's eyes.

"Mike Shayne, eh?" Scott said. "The famous detective, in person. What would you like to know?"

Shayne saw the worried look that Mildred Scott threw her husband. He could sense the immediate hostility in the man, and he wondered just what had caused it.

"I'm a detective, all right," he admitted, "and I'm doing a little job for Mr. Barron. Do you mind answering a question or two?"

"What's the matter, some of the silverware miss — "

"Kevin!" Mildred said sharply. "There's no need for that. I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. It's just that we've always thought that Mr. Barron trusted us."

"I do, I do," Talbott said quickly. "I told Mr. Shayne that you two couldn't possibly be mixed up in — " He broke off abruptly, realizing how close he was getting to blurting out his problems.

"Why don't we all take it easy?" Shayne put in, wondering if he was going to have to gag Talbott Barron. "All I'd like to know is a few

simple answers. Were there any visitors to the estate last night besides me?"

"None that I know of," Mildred answered quickly, while Scott still looked truculent.

"Who owns the car that was parked in front of the house?"

"That was Miss Barron's car," Scott said. "I tuned it up yesterday evening and then left it there in case she wanted to go out."

"Have the two of you been here in the kitchen for very long?"

"The last hour or so. Why?"

"Hear anything unusual?"

Scott shrugged. "A car backfiring somewhere, that's all. Did you hear anything else, Mildred?"

She shook her head, and Shayne went on, "Would you mind telling me where you worked before you came here?"

"Yes," Scott said. "I don't see that it's any of your business. We gave our references to Mr. Barron."

"That's right," Talbott put in. "They seemed fine, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne massaged his earlobe for a moment and stood silently. He had a feeling he wasn't going to get anything else useful here, but the longer he looked at Kevin Scott, the more familiar the man seemed. He nodded and said, "Thanks for talking to me. I'll be back around later, Mr. Barron. Remember everything I've told you."

"I certainly will," Talbott said as Shayne turned around and headed back toward the front of the house. As Shayne reached the front door and opened it, Talbott went on, "Do you really think the Scotts could have anything to do with it?"

"Most jobs like this one have an inside man," Shayne said brusquely. "They could fit the bill. There are some things I want to check out right now, but I'll see you again later this evening, before the drop. We'll go over everything one more time."

Talbott nodded as Shayne got into the Buick and pulled away. He still looked shaky, Shayne saw, and he knew they would have to have some luck on their side to pull off the plan to trap the blackmailer.

AS HE WAS DRIVING DOWN THE STREET less than a block away, it suddenly came to him where he had seen Kevin Scott before. Taking the radio-telephone from its place underneath the dashboard, he put in a call to Miami police headquarters and asked for Chief Will Gentry.

When he heard the gravelly tones of the chief in his ear, Shayne said, "Will, this is Mike. I need a favor, in a hurry."

"What else is new?" Gentry grunted. "What is it, Mike?"

"Check the records for a Kevin Scott, all right?"

"You call the chief of police to pull somebody's package for you?" Gentry asked.

"I figured you wouldn't be busy," Shayne said, seeing in his mind the way Gentry's beefy face would twist in a scowl.

The Chief agreed, though, and Shayne listened to several minutes of static as the records were being checked. When Gentry came back on the line, he said, "Got him, Mike. He's only taken one fall, but it was a good one. He spent most of the last ten years in the joint, only got out about nine months ago."

"I thought I remembered seeing his picture in the paper a long time ago," Shayne said. "What was the rap, Will?"

"Extortion," Gentry said, and Shayne's fingers tightened on the instrument. "Seems he threatened to kill a bank president's family unless he got paid a hundred grand."

## V

AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER, SHAYNE WAS CRUISING through open country to the northwest of Miami. The highway was a fairly small, two-lane span that was little used now. It had been a main artery through this part of the state at one time, but a newer, larger freeway had taken most of the traffic away from it. Now, it ran through quiet farmland, the sameness of the scenery broken occasionally by a gas station, a fruit stand, or a souvenir emporium that hadn't quite given up the ghost yet.

He had stopped at several places already, describing Talbott Barron and the girl in the picture, wishing he had a photo to show the people he questioned. It wouldn't have done to flash one of the blackmail pictures around, though. So far, no one he had talked to remembered seeing anyone like he described, at least not during the time he was asking about, the period of the full moon the month before.

Shayne knew he was playing a longshot, but the payoff wasn't until midnight, and he had some time to test his hunch. Whoever had taken the photos would have needed some secluded place to stage them, if indeed they were staged. Shayne hadn't been able to tell much about the vegetation in the background of the shots, but he had seen enough to eliminate the areas of strictly tropical growth. He remembered traveling along this road before, knew that since the freeway had opened up several years before, the whole area had become more rustic. It probably wouldn't be too hard at all to find a stretch of road along here that was totally deserted in the middle of the night. He had headed in this direction immediately after stopping by the office to

fill his secretary, Lucy Hamilton, in on the situation, picking up some fat hamburgers to eat on the way.

As he drove along now, smoking and letting the cool breeze from the car's air conditioner wash over him, he was starting to feel like this little jaunt had been a wasted effort. He had seen a lot of places that *could* have been the spot where the blackmail photos were taken, but unless he could turn up someone who had seen something he hadn't been meant to, the trip wasn't going to do any good.

Shayne's mouth was dry, and he could have used a drink. Further down the road, he spotted a building off to the side, and he decided that if by chance it was a bar, he was going to stop for more than just to ask questions about Talbott Barron and the girl. As he got closer, he saw the neon sign by the road, proclaiming simply BEER, and he hoped that it was cold.

The place looked a little run-down, and Shayne knew he would have driven right past it without giving it a second glance under other circumstances. Its clapboard shingles were weathered, and a screen door hung loosely on the entrance. Shayne pulled off the highway into the dirt parking lot, raising a cloud of dust. He waited for it to subside before he got out, studying the roadhouse through the Buick's windshield.

There were large windows on each side of the door, and the one on the right had faded lettering on it. Shayne saw that he had come to the HIWAY TAVERN. Original name, he thought, grinning. There was a ten-year-old pickup parked around to the side of the place, and a sleepy-eyed dog looked disinterestedly at him from the single concrete step that led up to the door. Shayne got out of the Buick and went into the place, stepping over the motionless animal.

Inside, the tavern managed to look gloomy despite the sunlight coming in through the large windows. A bar ran along the back of the wide room. There were booths around the other walls and a few tables scattered around the floor. The floor was wooden, and it creaked under Shayne's weight as he stepped into the room. Flies buzzed around his head, and though a big floor fan was going at one side of the room, it was still oppressively hot inside the bar. Shayne thought that it looked like something out of the Depression, and he halfway expected to see some of the migrant workers that had glutted Florida, just as they had California, come tiredly into the place.

The only other person in the room was a woman behind the bar. She was leaning into an opening between the front room of the tavern and the kitchen out back, talking to someone else. As Shayne eased a hip onto the cracked upholstery of a bar stool, she turned around with a

half-chuckle and said, "Can I help you, mister?"

She was the girl from the pictures, the girl who had been bloodied and savaged at Talbott Barron's feet . . .

SHAYNE USED EVERY OUNCE OF HIS SELF-CONTROL to keep the slight grin on his face and not let his surprise show. He said, "I'll take a beer, if it's cold."

"Coldest you'll find around here," she said, taking a frosted mug from a small freezer behind the bar and filling it with draft beer. She put it on the bar in front of Shayne, the foam spilling over the top and running wetly down the sides. Shayne picked it up and sipped at it thirstily. He was glad of the excuse to hide his expression from the girl for a moment.

When he set the mug back down, he smiled at her and said, "Is the weather always this hot around here?"

"Just about. We get the hot weather year-round. You from up north?"

Shayne shook his head. "Miami. So I'm used to it."

"Hell, you have to get used to it in a hurry down here, or suffocate," the girl laughed. She had long dark hair, a rather thin face that was still pretty, and a slender body. She was wearing jeans and a tight sleeveless pullover. Even though she looked much different than she had in the photos, she was undoubtedly the same girl. Enough of her face had been showing in the pictures for Shayne to be sure of that.

And she was very much alive. Shayne had been right. Talbott Barron hadn't killed her, probably hadn't killed anyone.

"This your place?" he asked after taking another swallow from the now-sweaty mug. He glanced through the window to the kitchen, hoping to see who the girl had been talking to when he had come in, but there was no one in his line of sight.

"No, sir, Mr. Newburg, he owns it. Owns the filling station up the road, too. Randy and I just work for him."

"Randy?" Shayne asked, hoping he didn't sound too curious.

"He's out back," the girl said. "If you'd like something to eat, we could fix you up a steak or something."

"No, thanks, I'm doing fine with this beer." Shayne glanced around the place again, trying to look like a man bored with driving and feeling talkative. "Bet you don't get the business you used to before the new road opened up."

"I wouldn't know. I've only been working here for a year or so. Randy and I came over from Georgia. My folks didn't much like us living together, so we decided we'd just leave. I like it in Florida

myself, but I don't think Randy cares for it much."

She was a little bored herself, Shayne saw. He could understand that, seeing as how she worked in this dump. Before he could say anything else, a man's voice called out from the kitchen, "Here, now, Charlene, don't be talking the customers' ears off with your life story. The man's not interested in that."

She smiled sheepishly at Shayne. "Sorry, mister, I guess Randy's right."

Shayne grinned. "Don't worry about it. Do you work here most of the time?"

"Yeah, it takes both of us nearly all of our time to keep the place going. Mr. Newburg has his gas station to run, and he can't afford to hire much help besides us."

"You see everybody who stops, then, don't you?"

"I guess so."

"Do you remember seeing a man about thirty, sort of heavyset, with dark hair and big thick glasses, about a month ago? He probably wouldn't have been much of a talker."

The smile all but dropped off of her face for a second. She plastered the expression back on, but it was obvious phony now. After a second, she said, "Gee, I don't think so. Of course, I don't remember everybody who comes through — "

"He would have been well-dressed, probably driving a nice car. Are you sure you don't remember him? It would have been one night last month. His name was — "

"Randy!" the girl called, interrupting Shayne's questioning. She wasn't even trying to conceal her agitation now, and her face was tight with fear. Shayne slipped off of the stool as the man called Randy suddenly emerged from a door at the end of the bar.

HE WAS BIG, WEARING A TEE SHIRT THAT WAS STRETCHED by the muscles of his shoulders and arms. Curly brown hair fell nearly to his shoulders, and he wore a full beard. He stopped at the end of the bar and glared at them, his gaze flicking back and forth between Shayne and the girl.

"What the hell's the trouble?" he snapped. "Charlene, you sounded like somebody stuck you."

"He's asking questions, Randy. I think he ought to leave."

Shayne spread his hands and said placatingly, "Look, mister, I didn't mean to upset anybody or anything. I was just making conversation — "

"The hell he was!" the girl spat out. "He was asking questions

about that man — ” She stopped short and put her hand to her mouth, realizing she might have said too much already.

Randy took a step toward Shayne and said, “You get on out of here, mister. You don’t have to pay for the beer or nothin’, just leave right now: We don’t want trouble.”

“Neither do I,” Shayne said flatly, dropping his attitude of inoffensiveness. “But I’m going to find out what you know about Talbott Barron, anyway.”

Randy tensed, and Shayne suspected the first blow, if there was one, would come from him. But he still had an eye on Charlene, and he saw her hand dart under the bar to come up with what looked like a sawed-off baseball bat.

She whipped the club at his head. Shayne ducked under the blow as it clipped his hat and knocked it off. Randy was lunging toward him, fists clenched, but Shayne was ready. His bony left fist shot out, driving deep into Randy’s stomach and bringing him to an abrupt, gasping stop. Straightening as he threw the punch, Shayne flung his right arm out and grabbed the club out of Charlene’s startled grasp.

He tossed the club off to the side as Randy tried to hit him again. This time he blocked the blow with his left forearm, then stepped in and slammed a right cross into the man’s jaw. Randy spun around, a pained grunt escaping from his lips, and sagged against the bar.

Shayne stepped back, his hand going under his coat and coming out with his pistol. He leveled the weapon at the young couple and barked, “Keep those hands above the bar, lady! Both of you just stand still.”

Randy supported himself with one hand on the bar and used the other to wipe away a trickle of blood where he had bitten his lip. He scowled at Shayne and said, “Who the hell are you, mister?”

“Just somebody who wants some answers,” Shayne snapped back at him. “I want to know why your girlfriend agreed to let somebody rip her clothes up and smear fake blood all over her.”

“It wasn’t fake blood!” Charlene burst out. “It was chicken blood, and I like to never got it washed off.”

“You were paid to do it, weren’t you?” Shayne asked. “You probably thought it was some kind of practical joke.”

“That’s what the man said,” Randy agreed. “Told us he was playing a joke on his buddy. I didn’t think he was telling us the whole story, but what the hell, he gave us two hundred dollars, and it only took a couple of hours to do the whole thing.”

Shayne was close now, he knew. He said, “The man who hired you, he took the pictures?”

“That’s right.”

"And the man with him acted funny, right, like he was drunk?"

"That's what we thought," Randy answered. "Thought he was just drunk. The fella with him told him what to do, how to stand in the pictures, even what kind of faces to make. It was kind of spooky, but hell, we didn't know it was going to get us into trouble."

"Maybe it won't." If they thought they might be in the clear after all, Shayne reasoned, maybe they would tell him the rest of what he wanted to know. "Did the man who hired you tell you his name?"

"No, the only name I heard was Talbott. That's what he called the funny-looking guy."

"What did he look like, the one who hired you and took the pictures?"

"He was tall, kind of an old fella, but he didn't really look all that old. He had dark hair, with some grey in it, and a moustache."

That was all Shayne needed to know. That description fit only one person involved in this case — Jeremy Whitson.

There was no need to go through with the planned payoff now, he knew. With these two to spill the whole story, he could collar Whitson as soon as he got back to Miami. There was a pay phone at the other end of the bar, and he gestured to it with his free hand. "Call the cops," he said to the girl. "You're going to tell them what you just told me."

Shayne kept his gun on Randy while Charlene edged down the bar toward the phone. Her hand suddenly darted out, seizing the mug of beer that the detective had been drinking from. Shayne saw the movement and started to spin toward her, but she flipped the heavy glass mug straight at his face. The dregs of the beer splashed in his eyes.

The mug missed him as he leaped to the side, but the distraction and the burning in his eyes was enough to throw him off balance. Randy leaped at him, knocking the gun aside. Shayne wouldn't have fired anyway, he needed them as witnesses against Whitson, but he tried to club the burly young man with the weapon. Randy dodged the swing and threw a roundhouse punch at Shayne's head.

His vision was blurring from the beer, and he couldn't get out of the way in time. The fist crashed into his face, knocking him backwards. Charlene scrambled out from behind the bar, running across the room and snatching up the club Shayne had taken from her. He was busy trying to block the flurry of punches that Randy was throwing at him and never saw her coming.

He knew when she hit him, though. The club thudded into his skull, sending great gouts of blackness spilling down over his brain. He slumped forward, felt Randy's fists smashing into him again, but he

couldn't do anything about it.

Shayne went down, unconscious before he hit the creaking wooden floor, unaware of the puddle of spilled beer underneath his head.

## VI

THE FIRST THING SHAYNE KNEW WAS THE WHINING in his ears. He didn't open his eyes, just lay still and listened to the sound, wondering if something was wrong with his ears due to the heavy blow on his head. But the sound went away after a few seconds, then came back a moment or two later.

Shayne made his muscles work, reached up, and brushed the persistent mosquito away from his ear. There was a red glow in front of his eyelids, and as he forced them open, he saw what was causing it: He was sitting in the front seat of his car, and it was pointing due west. The setting sun was just above the horizon, sending brilliant spears of light into his eyes.

Shayne winced and blocked the glare with a shaky hand. He sat up straighter and looked around. The Buick seemed to be sitting in the middle of a field. There was nothing around the car but tall weeds.

There didn't seem to be anything wrong with him except another sore lump on his head. His gun was gone, but his wallet and his money were intact. The spare gun he kept under the dash was still in place, he found, and he was grateful for that. He unclipped it and held it tightly in one hand while he opened the car door.

Stepping out into the weeds, Shayne looked around quickly. He could hear birds in the trees nearby, but there was no sign of anything human. As he turned around and took a closer look at the Buick, he couldn't help but mutter, "Oh, hell . . ."

All four tires were flat, slashed with a knife.

He didn't know how far the car would go on the rims in the soft dirt of this field, but he knew he had to give it a try. Getting back in, he reached for the key and found that it was gone. He sighed and got back out, raising the hood and getting ready to hot-wire the ignition.

The Buick still wouldn't start.

A check of the fuel line told him why. Someone had added sugar to the gasoline tank. They really hadn't wanted him to go anywhere in a hurry.

The sun was rapidly setting, and Shayne knew he didn't have much light left. He climbed onto the top of the car and scanned the surrounding vicinity, finally spotting a power line off to the north. Hoping down, he struck out in that direction. With any luck, there would

be a road over there, too.

Luck was one thing that seemed to be in short supply at the moment. The power line cut across country, but when Shayne reached it, he saw that there was no road nearby. At least the brush had been thinned out along the line, though, so he followed it wearily as darkness fell.

**HE HAD PROMISED TALBOTT BARRON THAT HE WOULD BE BY** during the evening, before the payoff. That was out of the question now; Shayne knew he would be doing good just to get back to Miami before midnight. As he trudged along, though, he had plenty of time to think about the case.

Whitson had been one of his four suspects, but the executive hadn't seemed to be hurting for money. He had a good position with the spice company and had held the job for quite a few years. Shayne didn't know for sure what his financial situation was, though. Whitson could have too great a fondness for the horses . . . or for the ladies. There were a lot of ways a man could lose a lot of money.

But there might be other reasons for framing Talbott and blackmailing him, too. Talbott was a man who had suffered one nervous breakdown and seemed to be on the verge of another. He had been made to think he was some sort of werewolf, which fit right in with the delusions he had suffered during the earlier breakdown. And then he had received the horrible pictures, showing him that he was not only a madman, but a homicidal madman. That would be enough to shove a delicately-balanced mind like his over the edge . . .

And that might well be the reason behind all of it, Shayne suddenly thought. Talbott had spoken the truth — whether he was a true werewolf, or just a lunatic who *thought* he was a werewolf, he would still have to be locked up. And once Talbott was locked up in an asylum somewhere, Jeremy Whitson could step in and run the company as he saw fit . . . for Jeremy Whitson's best interests.

But where did that leave Rebecca Barron? Shayne's pace speeded up at the thought. She would be in danger, too. If the blackmail scheme was really just a smokescreen for a power grab, then Rebecca would eventually be in Whitson's way as well. A mind that could cook up something as diabolical as what Whitson was trying to pull with Talbott wouldn't hesitate to go after a woman as well.

Shayne suddenly saw the glow of lights up ahead. They were moving from his right to this left, flickering into view for a moment, then disappearing again. He recognized them as headlights and almost broke into a run. He wasn't sure how long he had been walking, but when he looked at his watch, he was stunned to see that it was nearly

ten o'clock. His mind had been full of speculation about Whitson, and he had completely lost track of the time. He knew he would never make it back to Miami in time now.

Would Talbott go through with the drop, even though Shayne hadn't shown up as promised? The big redhead didn't know about that, but he just hoped Talbott had the sense to carry on. If he didn't, Whitson might well send the photos to the police. The cops wouldn't believe them, probably, but they would have to question Talbott anyway, and then the man's insecurities and fears of being a werewolf would come out, and the end result would be the same. Talbott would be out of the way, probably for good.

If he went through with the drop, however, that would buy them a little more time. Shayne didn't need much time now. He had the story, he had witnesses to back it up, and as soon as he got back into town, he would have Whitson himself.

And that would be a good feeling.

WHEN SHAYNE FINALLY REACHED THE ROAD, HE FOUND IT to be the highway he had been on earlier in the day. There must have been another road closer to the field where he had awakened since the Buick couldn't have been driven cross-country over the same route he had taken in walking out. Turning toward Miami, Shayne kept walking, waiting for a car to come along going in the same direction.

A half hour went by before the driver of a produce truck stopped and gave him a ride. By the time they rolled into Miami, the hands on Shayne's watch had moved around to just after midnight. The driver's route took him within three blocks of Lucy Hamilton's apartment, and Shayne thanked the man sincerely when he dropped off the truck. The man hadn't asked any questions, which made Shayne even more grateful, but he had refused all offers of payment. Shayne thanked him again and waved as the truck rolled away.

It took Lucy about thirty seconds to answer her door from the time Shayne knocked on it. She opened it the few inches the chain would allow, gasped when she saw him standing there, and quickly unfastened the chain so that she could open it all the way.

"What happened, Michael? I was worried when you never came back to the office. Is the case over?"

"I'm afraid not, Angel," Shayne said as he stepped into the apartment and shut the door behind him. "I think I've got most of the answers now, but I've still got to wrap things up."

Lucy was wearing a silken dressing gown that was tightly belted around her trim waist. As Shayne looked at her, he wished that he

could just stay there, rather than going back out to try to nab a criminal, but he knew he needed to wrap things up as soon as possible. Talbott Barron deserved that much for his money.

"I ran into some trouble out in the country," he said. "I need to borrow your car."

Lucy must have seen the tired, bleak look on his face. She didn't ask questions, just said, "I'll get the keys."

As Shayne took them from her, he leaned over and kissed her full lips quickly. "Thanks, Angel," he murmured. "I'll try to get the car back to your before morning."

"Don't worry about that, Michael. Just take care of yourself."

Shayne hurried over to the lot across the street from the apartment building where Lucy kept her compact car and squeezed his rangy body into the narrow confines of the vehicle. As he started the engine, he glanced at his watch again. It was a quarter after midnight. Probably too late to catch Whitson in the act of picking up the ice chest, assuming that Talbott had dropped it off the causeway, as he was supposed to. But Shayne knew he still had to check on the possibility.

WHEN HE REACHED THE LONG CAUSEWAY, HE PULLED OFF to the side of the road and killed the engine. Traffic was light as he stepped out of the car, and there was less street noise than usual. He listened intently as he scanned the surface of Biscayne Bay. There was nothing moving on the water that he could see, and no telltale sound of a boat's engines came to his ears. Darkness hung over the bay, and there could easily have been things out there on it that he couldn't see; likewise, if the engines of Whitson's boat were well-tuned, he might not be able to distinguish them. Shayne heaved a heavy sigh. All of his infrared equipment was back in his apartment. He had intended to pick it up when he returned from his short trip out of town. The trip had turned out to be not so short, though.

Shayne crossed the causeway, watching all the way for any sign of Whitson or Talbott. He saw nothing out of the ordinary, though. Either Talbott had backed out and never shown up, or everything was already over here. Shayne headed away from the causeway, looking for a phone booth with a directory.

When he found one, he discovered quickly that Jeremy Whitson was not listed. He could go directly to the Barron estate, or he could check Whitson's office. He decided on the latter, sending Lucy's car toward the spice packing plant. Shayne knew he wasn't going to be satisfied until he could put his hands on Whitson.

More questions popped into his head as he drove, but he tried not to

let them distract him from his mission. Whitson could provide the answers, anyway, once he was in custody.

Shayne took advantage of the light traffic to make good time on the way across town. If Whitson wasn't at his office, he would go right to Talbott's and tell him the whole story. That should ease the young man's mind considerably, to find out that the girl he thought he had killed was still very much alive.

As Shayne slowed down on the street in front of the plant, he gazed up at the office building and felt his fingers clench harder on the steering wheel. There was a light there, on the second floor, where he guessed Whitson's office was located. He parked the car on the street and walked quickly to the gate leading into the complex.

It was locked, but there was no guard on duty, and the fence was easily scaled. Shayne supposed there was no great need for extra security measures at a spice company. As he dropped down on the other side of the fence, he spotted a car parked next to the building. Whitson's, he was sure.

The door into the lobby was unlocked. Shayne smiled grimly. Whitson was making it easy for him. He slipped into the building, moving with a quiet grace that he had cultivated over the dangerous years. Bypassing the elevator, he took the same flight of stairs he had climbed the previous morning.

The door to Whitson's office suite was slightly ajar, Shayne saw when he reached the second floor. He walked toward it, slipping his hand inside his coat and wrapping his fingers around the butt of his pistol. Standing in the darkened hallway before the door, he listened carefully for a long moment, detecting no sounds of movement inside. That surprised him a little bit. He wondered what Whitson was doing in there.

Placing the palm of his free hand on the door, Shayne drew his gun and suddenly shoved the panel open. He leaped into the anteroom, gun raised and ready, only to stop short when he saw that it was deserted. The door to Whitson's inner office was open, though. Shayne stepped over to it, shoving it open even more with his foot.

The light was on inside. Shayne saw the ice chest on the big desk, proof that Talbott had done his part and that Whitson had fished it out of the bay. And then he saw what was in the chair behind the desk.

Shayne stood stock-still for seconds that seemed like hours, then holstered his gun and said quietly, "Damn." He stepped further into the room and looked at the body.

Jeremy Whitson was behind his desk, but he would never make another decision, regarding the company or anything else.

There was a ragged slash across his throat, and more blood than Shayne had seen in a long time.

## VII

THE NIGHT WAS WARM, THE HEAT OF THE DAY BEFORE still rising from where it had been trapped in the ground. Despite the temperature, though, Shayne felt almost cold as he drove away from the Miami branch of the Barron Condiment and Spice Company.

He had left Whitson exactly as he found him, but he had taken the memory of that dead face away with him. Etched on Whitson's features had been a look of surprise and terror. Red, ugly scratches covered his face. Judging by the contorted position of the body and the clutter from the desk top that was scattered on the floor, there had been a brief struggle before Whitson was killed.

Shayne glanced out the window of the car as he sped through the quiet streets. The full, round globe of the moon glowed down at him. If there really had been a man in the moon, he would be laughing right about now, laughing at the big redheaded shamus for what he was thinking.

Shayne knew damn well it was crazy, but he was suddenly wondering about silver bullets and things like that . . .

A wide grin stretched his mouth abruptly. He would admit that the wounds on Whitson looked like they could have been made by some kind of animal, but other things could have caused them, too. Just the fact that he had been so shaken up as to actually consider the possibility of a werewolf really existing for a moment, now made him think more clearly than ever. And the more he thought about everything he had seen and heard over the last couple of days, the more he was convinced that he had the answers.

By the time he reached the Barron estate, the grin on his face had turned into a bleak mockery of a smile. He had put the pieces of his theory together in his brain as he drove, and they all fit. All he had to do now was prove it.

He braked to a stop at the front door and was out of the car quickly. Before he got to the door, it was thrown open, and Talbott Barron, looking as frightened as Shayne had ever seen him, exclaimed, "Mr. Shayne! What happened? I waited for you and waited for you — "

"A lot of things happened," Shayne cut in. "You went through with the drop like we planned, didn't you?"

Talbott nodded. "Yes, only I really put the money in the ice chest. Since you never came back, I was afraid something had — had hap-

pened to you. I thought I should do like the note told me to do, in that case. Was that all right?"

Shayne swallowed the curse he felt coming up his throat. "Sure," he said quickly. "You had to do what you thought best, I guess. But we may never get the hundred grand back. It wasn't in the ice chest when I caught up with the guy who picked it up."

Talbott reached out and grasped Shayne's arm. "You caught him?" he burst out. "Who was it? Did you tell the police? What about the pictures, did you get the negatives?"

Shayne shook his arm loose. "Slow down. Get in the car, and I'll tell you all about it. Where's your sister?"

"She said she was going out on a date. Get in the car? Where are we going?"

"We've got some witnesses to round up, before it's too late."

Talbott looked completely baffled, but he slipped into the passenger seat of Lucy's car as Shayne had instructed. As Shayne wheeled the car back down the driveway and out into the street, he asked again, "What happened to you, Mr. Shayne? Did you run into trouble?"

"What happened was some good luck and some bad luck," Shayne said tightly. "First of all, Barron, you didn't kill that girl. I know that for a fact."

"But how — "

"Because I saw her alive about eight hours ago. In fact, I got into a fight with her and her boyfriend."

Talbott stared at Shayne with unbelieving eyes. "You . . . saw her?"

"Yeah. She was working as a barmaid in a crummy little beer joint way out in the country. She and the boyfriend helped set up those blackmail photos, all for a couple of hundred bucks. They thought you were drunk, that you were having a practical joke played on you. They couldn't know that you had been drugged, and that there was nothing funny about the scheme."

"Drugged . . . ?" This was all going too fast for Talbott. Shayne glanced over at him in the glow from the dashboard lights, saw his face slack and stunned.

"That's why you've been having blackouts for the past few months," Shayne went on. "It didn't have anything to do with that nervous breakdown you had before, or the delusions you had then that you were some sort of monster."

Talbott's face fell, and he said softly, "You know about that; then?"

"I sure as hell do," Shayne said harshly. "You don't hire a detective and then tie his hands by not giving him the whole story, Barron. You'd better remember that if you ever get in a jam again."

"It was so long ago," Talbott said, shaking his head. "It was all so silly, and I'd been trying so hard to forget that it ever happened . . ."

"Well, it didn't happen again, and that's the important thing, I suppose. You're no werewolf, and you never would have thought you might be if you hadn't been drugged over a period of months and had the suggestion beaten into your head. You were set up, and set up good."

"But who would do such a thing?"

"Jeremy Whitson," Shayne said flatly.

Talbott sagged to the side as Shayne took a curve at high speed. Whether it was from the acceleration or the shock of the words, Shayne didn't know. Talbott said, "Jeremy? But why would he — he's been with the company for years, he was with my dad at the first —"

"Maybe he got tired of playing second fiddle to the Barrons," Shayne suggested. "He could have thought that he should be running the company, instead of you."

"But he practically did run the company. Dad's will specified that Jeremy would have a job with the company for as long as he wanted it."

Shayne frowned. "Maybe he wanted more than just a job. It could be that he thought with you and your sister out of the way, he could buy the company up cheap."

"Rebecca!"

Shayne nodded. "Take it easy. I don't think she's in any danger right now. I know that Whitson can't hurt her, but I imagine he had plans for her, once he had driven you back into an asylum."

"But how can you be so sure he won't try to hurt her?" Talbott demanded, emotion making his voice shake.

"Because he's dead."

"Dead?" Talbott whispered.

"I found out from the girl in the pictures that it was Whitson who hired her and set the pictures up. So when I got back to Miami, I went to the plant on a hunch and found Whitson there. He had been attacked by someone . . . or something . . . and he looked like he had been dead for a while. He probably went there and was killed right after he picked up the ice chest in the bay."

"Who — who could have killed him?"

"He had a partner," Shayne said. "And he got double-crossed by that partner. It happens all the time."

"Do you know who?" Talbott asked anxiously.

"I've got a feeling we'll know before too long."

That was all that Shayne said. Talbott opened his mouth to ask

something else, but he closed it again without saying anything. He turned his head toward the window and stared at the night rushing by outside. A silence fell over the little car, and Shayne didn't really mind. He was tired, and he could use a rest from explaining things.

IF TRAFFIC HAD BEEN LIGHT ON THE HIGHWAY to the northwest the day before, it was nonexistent now in the wee hours. Shayne pushed the accelerator to the floor, coaxing every last bit of speed from the car's small frame. He was beginning to worry that they might already be too late. Now that Whitson was dead, the man's murderous partner would want to cover up any traces of a trail.

They made good time. It had been a few minutes less than an hour when Shayne skidded off the highway into the parking lot of the rundown tavern. The dog on the step was nowhere to be seen now, and the place was completely dark inside. Shayne killed the lights and the engine as dust billowed around them.

"This is the place I saw the girl in the pictures," he told Talbott. "Are you coming in, or would you rather wait out here?"

"I'm going in if you are," Talbott said, but he sounded dubious about the decision. "It doesn't look like anybody's here, though."

"Maybe that's what they want us to think." Shayne slipped out of the car, his gun in his hand. "Come on."

With his client close behind him, Shayne went over to the door of the tavern. It was closed and locked, but Shayne didn't even have to resort to the ring of skeleton keys he always carried. He grasped the knob and turned as hard as he could, and in the silence of the night, he heard the rasping sound of the latch giving way.

When he had pushed the door open carefully, he reached inside with his free hand and located a light switch next to the door. Nothing happened when he flipped it up, though. He said in a low voice, "Power's out. Take it easy when we go inside."

Moonlight was washing down, filtering in through the two large windows, and it gave enough illumination to let Shayne see the general outlines of the room as he stepped inside. He kept his gun ready as he took two cautious steps into the room, Talbott breathing heavily and all but oozing fear right behind him.

Shayne stopped in his tracks when he saw the two vague forms at the bar. One was seated on a stool in front of the bar, the other was behind it, but both of them were slumped motionlessly over the hard-wood. Neither of them moved as Shayne slowly started forward again.

He reached out, the moonlight throwing grotesque shadows over the room as he moved. His fingers brushed the hair of the figure on the

stool, and he took hold carefully and lifted the head from the bar. Even in the pale light, he could see the second grinning mouth carved in the throat, and he knew from the strangled gasp behind him that Talbott saw it, too.

Shayne eased the corpse back into its original position and said softly, "That was the girl, Barron. So you see, you didn't kill her a month ago, like you thought you had." He touched the dead girl's face lightly for a moment, then dipped a finger into the puddle of blood on the bar. "From the looks of things," he went on, "she was only killed a few minutes ago in fact. A quarter of an hour, maybe, but no more than a half hour."

"My God," Talbott breathed. "The other one — Is he . . . ?"

Shayne checked the body of the young man who had been called Randy and said, "He's dead, too. They were the witnesses I wanted, the ones who could prove that Whitson was behind the plot to drive you insane. Now all we have left is Whitson's partner."

"Whoever it was must have killed these two," Talbott said quickly. "They wanted to cover up their trail, like you said. And now they've probably taken off with the money for who-knows-where. What are we going to do, Mr. Shayne? I'm so mixed up . . . So many people are dead — " His head jerked up, and Shayne saw the moonlight shining on his thick glasses. "Rebecca! We've got to get back to Miami, so we can warn Rebecca!"

Shayne shook his head. "We don't have to warn your sister. The killer's still here."

He wouldn't have thought it possible for Talbott to become paler, but somehow the young man did just that. "S-still here? I don't understand, I just — "

"Listen," Shayne said sharply.

Talbott was quiet, and they both heard what Shayne's keen ears had picked up almost as soon as they came into the bar — an almost inaudible creaking. It was coming from the kitchen . . .

"These floors are old and getting rotten," Shayne said, no longer bothering to keep his voice down. "You can't even stand on them without making some noise."

HE WAS SWINGING TOWARD THE DOOR INTO THE KITCHEN even as a twisted, soul-numbing cry rang out and the door flew open. He saw the shape come lunging at him, but he didn't fire his gun. Jerking his head to the side, he grabbed the killer whom he had lured out of hiding and grappled fiercely for a long moment. Talbott Barron

was crying, "No! No!" but Shayne was only vaguely aware of the sounds.

His hands were full of insanely-struggling female. He grasped Rebecca Barron's wrist and held the sharp instrument she wielded away from his neck. He knew that if he gave her the slightest chance, she would rip his throat open with her maniacal strength, as she had done to Whitson, Randy, and Charlene.

Her fury was giving her more strength. They swayed together across the room in a macabre dance. Shayne's grip on her wrist slipped momentarily, and the blade sliced the air right in front of his face. As he grabbed her again, his gun slipped from his fingers and fell to the wooden floor. It went sliding away into the darkness.

Shayne bent Rebecca's wrist back as far as he could, and as she cursed and spat in his face, the weapon finally came loose and clattered to the floor. Shayne balled a fist loosely and whipped it up, clipping her on the point of her chin. Her head snapped back, and she went suddenly limp in his arms.

As he held her upright, he heard choking sobs behind him, and Talbott Barron gasped out, "Oh, my God, not Rebecca, not Rebecca! It can't be! Let her go!"

Shayne looked over his shoulder and stiffened at what he saw in the lunar glow. Talbott had picked up the gun and was holding it out in front of him. The barrel was shaking, but it was still pointed in Shayne's direction. Talbott cried out again, "Let her go, Mr. Shayne! She's my sister! I can't let you do this to her!"

Shayne kept his hold on the stunned Rebecca and said quickly, "The only one who did anything to her was Jeremy Whitson, Talbott. And Whitson is dead now. The time's come to stop it, all of it."

"She couldn't have done those things, she just couldn't have!"

"And I'm sure she wouldn't have," Shayne told him, "if Whitson hadn't drugged her, the same as he drugged you." He held one of her arms up. "We'll find needle marks on her, Talbott, I'm sure of it. I don't know how Whitson got her started, probably slipped knock-out drops to her and shot her up while she was out, but he got her addicted, and then he put himself in a position to rule her life, make her do whatever he told her to do. And that included drugging you and playing games with your mind, trying to drive you over the edge. Once he was through with you, he would have cut her off from the junk, and she probably would have wound up in a mental hospital, too. Listen to me, Talbott — "

"No! I'm through listening. Rebecca would never hurt me. You let her go — "

A low moan escaped from Rebecca's lips, and with no more warning than that, she was awake and struggling again in Shayne's arms. She cried out, "Let me go, you goddamn bastard! I'll kill you, I'll kill all of you!"

Shayne pivoted sharply, keeping his grip secure on her and swinging her around between himself and Talbott. Using her as a shield didn't sit right with him, but he had to get Talbott to listen to reason somehow. He shook Rebecca and barked, "You killed them, didn't you, Whitson and the others?"

"I killed them!" she screeched, madness making her voice raw and hoarse. "I took the money from him, he didn't have any right to it! He made me like this, the bastard! He made me like this —"

She broke off to struggle some more, and Shayne prodded, "It was Whitson who jumped me last night outside the house, wasn't it? He was wearing a werewolf mask and howling and trying to make me think Talbott was crazy before I ever heard the story. You told him that Talbott had called me, didn't you?"

"It was him," she spat out. "It was always him. He made me put things in Talbott's food and drinks — Oh, God, he hurt me! — He wouldn't give me what I needed . . . what I *needed* . . ."

The barrel of the gun in Talbott's hand was starting to sag now, but Shayne knew he had to plunge ahead, had to force it all out, for the sake of all of them. He said, "You were the one who shot at me at the estate, though, weren't you?"

"He *told* me to! I had to do it! He was afraid of you —"

"And you were afraid of him. You decided you had to get rid of him, if you were ever going to have a chance of leading a normal life again, a life where you wouldn't have to live a lie and do things to hurt your brother."

Rebecca's struggles subsided slightly. She flung her head from side to side, whipping her long black hair around, as frenzied emotion gripped her.

"You don't know what it is like!" she cried. "I love my brother —" Her eyes locked on the shuddering Talbott. "I love you," she said. "I had to kill them, had to stop Jeremy. He hated us, hated both of us . . ."

Most of the fight had gone out of her now. Shayne said, his voice softer and less harsh. "These two called Whitson yesterday afternoon, didn't they? It was their idea to take me out in the country and dump me, but they were still scared, and Whitson had told them to contact him if anyone came snooping around about the photographs they helped with. When Whitson told you about me being out here asking

questions, you knew you would have to kill them, too. You wanted Whitson dead, and you wanted anyone else who might know about the plot dead, too. That was the only way you'd ever be safe."

"I — I didn't want to do it, but they might have told somebody about the things they helped with." Rebecca was shaking in Shayne's arms now, and Talbott looked like he had aged fifty years in the last ten minutes. "I'm sorry, I really am. I could have kicked the stuff, I know I could have, if I only had the chance — " She looked back over her shoulder at Shayne, and for a moment, he saw absolute lucidity in her eyes as she looked at him. "I'm sorry," she whispered. "But please . . . please help me."

Shayne looked past her, looked at her brother, who was still standing in a patch of the moonlight he had dreaded so, with the gun still clutched tightly in his shaking hand. Shayne said, "What about it, Talbott? What are you going to do now?"

Talbott's tongue came out, flicked at his parched lips. He started to speak but couldn't get the words out. He raised the gun again —

And reached over to drop it on the bar. He put his face in his hands for long seconds, then lifted it and said, "We'll help you, Rebecca. We'll help you . . . "

THE MAN-MADE LIGHTS HAD COME AND GONE NOW, the flashing red-and-blue lights of Sheriff's cars, and state police cars, and ambulances. Flashbulbs had popped in a constant barrage of artificial illumination for long minutes, and brilliant banks of spotlights had been set up so that the technicians could do their work while Shayne and Talbott Barron told their stories over and over again.

But now the lights that the law brought were gone, and the only illumination on the scene was that of the moon, more yellow now as it slid down toward the horizon. The topmost branches of the trees around the tavern were reaching for it like long thin fingers striving for something unattainable, Shayne saw as he paused beside Lucy's car.

It had been only minutes since everyone else left, but already the deserted roadhouse and the area around it were peaceful again. The bodies were gone, taken to the county morgue. Talbott and Rebecca had left together in an ambulance, she on her way to a mental hospital where she would probably be spending most of her days for a long time, except for court appearances. And Talbott would be with her as much as possible, Shayne knew.

He could imagine the chewing out he would get from the authorities in Miami over his failure to report the murder of Jeremy Whitson, but at the moment, he didn't give a damn. He was thinking, instead, of the

violence, the destruction, that had its seeds in Talbott's breakdown in the past and had sprung to life in Whitson's desire to seize total control of the company that had been his life's work for so many years. Whitson had been the architect of his own doom, but he had taken Rebecca Barron and the two young people named Randy and Charlene with him, and that was the worst of it. At least Talbott had been saved from the demons Whitson had tried to conjure up. Shayne glanced up at the moon and lit a cigarette. Maybe there was something to that old theory that the full moon made people a little crazy, he thought. He knew that the moonlight wasn't as pretty to him anymore . . . and it probably wouldn't be for a while.

Shayne shrugged his shoulders and got in Lucy's car, and then he drove away from there as fast as he could. ☀

Next month



Mike Shayne returns

in

CRY IN THE NIGHT

A New Short Novel

by

Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

*As the man raised his gun to shoot, the girl dropped to her knees and began to chant in a soft voice, a prayer to the beast that battled monsters and evil beings and saved Indians from harm.*

# COYOTE AND QUARTER MOON

by BILL PRONZINI and JEFFREY WALLMANN

WITH THE LAUREL COUNTY DEPUTY SHERIFF BESIDE HER, Jill Quarter-Moon waited for the locksmith to finish unlatching the garage door. Inside, the dog — a good-sized Doberman; she had identified it through the window — continued its frantic barking.

The house to which the garage belonged was only a few years old, a big ranch-style set at the end of a cul-de-sac and somewhat removed from its neighbors in the expensive Oregon Estates development. Since it was a fair Friday morning in June, several of the neighbors were out and mingling in a wide crescent around the property; some of them Jill recognized from her previous visit here. Two little boys were chasing each other around her Animal Regulation Agency truck, stirring up a pair of other barking dogs nearby. It only added to the din being raised by the Doberman.

At length the locksmith finished and stepped back. "It's all yours," he said.

"You'd better let me go in with you," the deputy said to Jill.

There was a taint of chauvinism in his offer, but she didn't let it upset her. She was a mature twenty-six, and a full-blooded Umatilla Indian, and she was comfortable with both her womanhood and her role in society. She was also strikingly attractive, in the light-skinned way of Pacific Northwest Indians, with hip-length brown hair and a long willowy body. Some men, the deputy being one of them, seemed to feel protective, if not downright chivalric, toward her. Nothing made her like a man less than being considered a pretty-and-helpless female.

She shook her head at him and said, "No thanks. I've got my tranquilizer dart gun."

"Suit yourself, then." The deputy gave her a disapproving frown and stepped back out of her way. "It's your throat."

**JILL DREW A HEAVY PADDED GLOVE OVER HER LEFT HAND**, gripped the dart gun with her right. Then she caught hold of the door latch and depressed it. The Doberman stopped barking; all she could hear from inside were low growls. The dog sensed that someone was coming in, and when she opened the door it would do one of two things: back off and watch her, or attack. She had no way of telling beforehand which it would be.

The Doberman had been locked up inside the garage for at least thirty-six hours. That was how long ago it had first started howling and barking and upsetting the neighbors enough so that one of them had complained to the Agency. The owner of the house, Jill had learned in her capacity as field agent, was named Edward Benham; none of the neighbors knew him — he'd kept to himself during the six months he had lived here — and none of them knew anything at all about his dog. Benham hadn't answered his door, nor had she been able to reach him by telephone or track down any local relatives. Finally she had requested, through the Agency offices, a court order to enter the premises. A judge had granted it, and along with the deputy and the locksmith, here she was to release the animal.

She hesitated a moment longer with her hand on the door latch. If the Doberman backed off, she stood a good chance of gentling it enough to lead it out to the truck; she had a way with animals, dogs in particular — something else she could attribute to her Indian heritage. But if it attacked she would have no choice except to shoot it with the tranquilizer gun. An attack-trained, or even an untrained but high-strung, Doberman could tear your throat out in a matter of seconds.

Taking a breath, she opened the door and stepped just inside the entrance. She was careful to act natural, confident; too much caution could be as provoking to a nervous animal as movements too bold or

too sudden. Black and short-haired, the Doberman was over near one of the walls — yellowish eyes staring at her, fangs bared and gleaming in the light from the open doorway and the single dusty window. But it stood its ground, forelegs spread, rear end flattened into a crouch.

"Easy," Jill said soothingly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

She started forward, extending her hand, murmuring the words of a lullabye in Shahaptian dialect. The dog cocked its head, ears perked, still growling, still tensed — but it continued to stay where it was and its snub of a tail began to quiver. That was a good sign, Jill knew. No dog wagged its tail before it attacked.

As her eyes became more accustomed to the half light, she could see that there were three small plastic bowls near the Doberman; each of them had been gnawed and deeply scratched. The condition of the bowls told her that the dog had not been fed or watered during the past thirty-six hours. She could also see that in one corner was a wicker sleeping basket about a foot and a half in diameter, and that on a nearby shelf lay a curry comb. These things told her something else, but just what it meant she had no way of knowing yet.

"Easy, boy . . . calm," she said in English. She was within a few paces of the dog now and it still showed no inclination to jump at her. Carefully she removed the thick glove, stretched her hand out so that the Doberman could better take her scent. "That's it, just stay easy, stay easy . . ."

The dog stopped growling. The tail stub began to quiver faster, the massive head came forward and she felt the dryness of its nose as it investigated her hand. The yellow eyes looked up at her with what she sensed was a wary acceptance.

Slowly she put away the tranquilizer gun and knelt beside the animal, murmuring the lullabye again, stroking her hand around its neck and ears. When she felt it was ready to trust her she straightened and patted the dog, took a step toward the entrance. The Doberman followed. And kept on following as she retraced her path toward the door.

**THEY WERE HALFWAY THERE WHEN THE DEPUTY APPEARED** in the doorway. "You all right in there, lady?" he called.

The Doberman bristled, snarled again low in its throat. Jill stopped and stood still. "Get away, will you?" she said to the deputy, using her normal voice, masking her annoyance so the dog wouldn't sense it. "Get out of sight. And find a hose or a faucet, get some water puddled close by. This animal is dehydrated."

The deputy retreated. Jill reached down to stroke the Doberman

another time, then led it slowly out into the sunlight. When they emerged she saw that the deputy had turned on a faucet built into the garage wall; he was backed off to one side now, one hand on the weapon holstered at his side, like an actor in a B movie. The dog paid no attention to him or to anyone else. It went straight for the water and began to lap at it greedily. Jill went with it, again bent down to soothe it with her hands and voice.

While she was doing that she also checked the license and rabies tags attached to its collar, making a mental note of the numbers stamped into the thin aluminum. Now that the tenseness of the situation had eased, anger was building within her again at the way the dog had been abused. Edward Benham, whoever he was, would pay for that, she thought. She'd make certain of it.

The moment the Doberman finished drinking, Jill stood and faced the bystanders. "All of you move away from the truck," she told them. "And keep those other dogs quiet."

"You want me to get the back open for you?" the deputy asked.

"No. He goes up front with me."

"Up front? Are you crazy, lady?"

"This dog has been cooped up for a long time," Jill said. "If I put him back, in the cage, he's liable to have a fit. And he might never trust me again. Up front I can open the window, talk to him, keep him calmed down."

The deputy pursed his lips reprovingly. But as he had earlier, he said, "It's your throat," and backed off with the others.

When the other dogs were still Jill caught hold of the Doberman's collar and led it down the driveway to the truck. She opened the passenger door, patted the seat. The Doberman didn't want to go in at first, but she talked to it, coaxing, and finally it obeyed. She shut the door and went around and slid in under the wheel.

"Good boy," she told the dog, smiling. "We showed them, eh?"

Jill put the truck in gear, turned it around, and waved at the scowling deputy as she passed him by.

AT THE AGENCY — A MASSIVE OLD BRICK BUILDING not far from the university — she turned the Doberman over to Sam Wyatt, the resident veterinarian, for examination and treatment. Then she went to her desk in the office area reserved for field agents and sat down with the Benham case file.

The initial report form had been filled out by the dispatcher who had logged the complaint from one of Benham's neighbors. That report listed the breed of Benham's dog as an Alaskan husky, female — not a

Doberman, male. Jill had been mildly surprised when she went out to the house and discovered that the trapped dog was a Doberman. But then, the Agency was a bureaucratic organization, and like all bureaucratic organizations it made mistakes in paperwork more often than it ought to. It was likely that the dispatcher, in checking the registry files for the Benham name, had either pulled the wrong card or miscopied the information from the right one.

But Jill kept thinking about the sleeping basket and the curry comb inside the garage. The basket had been too small for the Doberman but about the right size for a female husky. And curry combs were made for long-haired, not short-haired dogs.

The situation puzzled as well as angered her. And made her more than a little curious. One of the primary character traits of the Umatilla was inquisitiveness, and Jill had inherited it along with her self-reliance and her way with animals. She had her grandmother to thank for honing her curiosity, though, for teaching her never to accept any half-truth or partial answer. She could also thank her grandmother, who had been born in the days when the tribe lived not on the reservation in northeastern Oregon but along the Umatilla River — the name itself meant "many rocks" or "water rippling over sand" — for nurturing her love for animals and leading her into her present job with the Agency. As far back as Jill could remember, the old woman had told and retold the ancient legends about "the people" — the giant creatures, Salmon and Eagle and Fox and the greatest of all, Coyote, the battler of monsters, who ruled the earth before the human beings were created, before all animals shrank to their present size.

But she was not just curious about Benham for her own satisfaction; she had to have the proper data for her report. If the Agency pressed charges for animal abuse, which was what she wanted to see happen, and a heavy fine was to be levied against Benham, all pertinent information had to be correct.

**SHE WENT TO THE REGISTRY FILES AND PULLED THE CARD** on Edward Benham. The dispatcher, it turned out, *hadn't* made a mistake after all: the breed of dog listed as being owned by Benham was an Alaskan husky, female. Also, the license and rabies tag numbers on the card were different from those she had copied down from the Doberman's collar.

One good thing about bureaucratic organizations, she thought, was that they had their filing systems cross-referenced. So she went to the files arranged according to tag numbers and looked up the listed owner of the Doberman.

The card said: *Fox Hollow Kennels, 1423 Canyon Road, Laurel County, Oregon.*

Jill had heard of Fox Hollow Kennels; it was a fairly large place some distance outside the city, operated by a man named Largo or Fargo, which specialized in raising a variety of purebred dogs. She had been there once on a field investigation that had only peripherally concerned the kennel. She was going to make her second visit, she decided, within the next hour.

The only problem with that decision was that her supervisor, Lloyd Mortisse, vetoed it when she went in to tell him where she was going. Mortisse was a lean, mournful-looking man in his late forties, with wild gray hair that reminded Jill of the beads her grandmother had strung into ornamental baskets. He was also a confirmed bureaucrat, which meant that he loved paperwork, hated anything that upset the routine, and was suspicious of the agents' motives every time they went out into the field.

"Call up Fox Hollow," he told her. "You don't need to go out there; the matter doesn't warrant it."

"I think it does."

"You have other work to do, Ms. Quarter-Moon."

"Not as important as this, Mr. Mortisse."

She and Mortisse were constantly at odds. There was a mutual animosity, albeit low-key, based on his part by a certain condescension — either because she was a woman or an Indian, or maybe both — and on her part by a lack of respect. It made for less than ideal working conditions.

He said, "And I say it's not important enough for you to neglect your other duties."

"Ask that poor Doberman how important it is."

"I repeat, you're not to pursue the matter beyond a routine telephone call," Mortisse told her sententiously. "Now is that understood?"

"Yes. It's understood."

Jill pivoted, stalked out of the office, and kept right on stalking through the rear entrance and out to her truck. Twenty minutes later she was turning onto the long gravel drive, bordered by pine and Douglas fir, that led to the Fox Hollow Kennels.

She was still so annoyed at Mortisse, and preoccupied with Edward Benham, that she almost didn't see the large truck that came barreling toward her along the drive until it was too late. As it was, she managed to swerve off onto the soft shoulder just in time, and to answer the truck's horn blast with one of her own. It was an old Ford stakebed, she

saw as it passed her and braked for the turn onto Canyon Road, with the words *Fox Hollow Kennels* on the driver's door. Three slat-and-wire crates were tied together on the bed, each of which contained what appeared to be a mongrel dog. The dogs had begun barking at the sound of the horns and she could see two of them pawing at the wire mesh.

Again she felt both her curiosity and her anger aroused. Transporting dogs in bunches via truck wasn't exactly inhuman treatment, but it was still a damned poor way to handle animals. And what was an American Kennel Club-registered outfit which specialized in purebreds doing with mongrels?

Jill drove up the access drive and emerged into a wide gravel parking area. The long whitewashed building that housed Fox Hollow's office was on her right, with a horseshoe arrangement of some thirty kennels and an exercise yard behind it. Pine woods surrounded the complex, giving it a rustic atmosphere.

**WHEN SHE PARKED AND GOT OUT, THE SOUND** of more barking came to her from the vicinity of the exercise yard. She glanced inside the office, saw that it was empty, and went through a swing-gate that led to the back. There, beside a low fence, a man stood tossing dog biscuits into the concrete run on the other side, where half a dozen dogs — all of these purebred setters — crowded and barked together. He was in his late thirties, average-sized, with bald head and nondescript features, wearing Levi's and a University of Oregon sweatshirt. Jill recognized him as the owner, Largo or Fargo.

"Mr. Largo?" she said.

He turned, saying, "The name is Fargo." Then he set the food sack down and wiped his hands on his Levi's. His eyes were speculative as he studied both her and her tan Agency uniform. "Somethin I can do for you, miss?"

Jill identified herself. "I'm here about a dog," she said, "a male Doberman, about three years old. It was abandoned inside a house in Oregon Estates at least two days ago; we went in and released it this morning. The house belongs to a man named Benham, Edward Benham, but the Doberman is registered to Fox Hollow."

Fargo's brows pulled down. "Benham, did you say?"

"That's right. Edward Benham. Do you know him?"

"Well, I don't recognize the name."

"Is it possible you sold him the Doberman?"

"I suppose it is," Fargo said. "Some people don't bother to change the registration. Makes a lot of trouble for all of us when they don't."

"Yes, it does. Would you mind checking your records?"

"Not at all."

He led her around and inside the kennel office. It was a cluttered room that smelled peculiarly of dog, dust, and cheap men's cologne. An open door on the far side led to an attached workroom; Jill could see a bench littered with tools, stacks of lumber, and several slat-and-wire crates of the type she had noticed on the truck, some finished and some under construction.

Along one wall was a filing cabinet and Fargo crossed to it, began to rummage inside. After a time he came out with a folder, opened it, consulted the papers it held, and put it away again. He turned to face Jill.

"Yep," he said, "Edward Benham. He bought the Doberman about three weeks ago. I didn't handle the sale myself; one of my assistants took care of it. That's why I didn't recognize the name."

"Is your assistant here now?"

"No, I gave him a three-day weekend to go fishing."

"Is the Doberman the only animal Benham has bought from you?"

"As far as the records show, it is."

"Benham is the registered owner of a female Alaskan husky," Jill said. "Do you know anyone who specializes in that breed?"

"Not offhand. Check with the American Kennel Club; they might be able to help you."

"I'll do that." Jill paused. "I passed your truck on the way in, Mr. Fargo. Do you do a lot of shipping of dogs?"

"Some, yes. Why?"

"Just curious. Where are those three today bound?"

"Portland." Fargo made a deliberate point of looking at his watch. "If you'll excuse me, I've got work to do . . ."

"Just one more thing. I'd like to see your American Kennel Club registration on the Doberman you sold Benham."

"Can't help you there, I'm afraid," Fargo said. "There wasn't any AKC registration on that Doberman."

"No? Why not? He's certainly a purebred."

"Maybe so, but the animal wasn't bred here. We bought it from a private party who didn't even know the AKC existed."

"What was this private party's name?"

"Adams. Charles Adams. From out of state — California. That's why Fox Hollow was the first to register the dog with you people."

Jill decided not to press the matter, at least not with Fargo personally. She had other ways of finding out information about him, about Fox Hollow, and about Edward Benham. She thanked Fargo for his

time, left the office, and headed her truck back to the Agency.

**WHEN SHE GOT THERE SHE WENT FIRST TO SEE SAM WYATT,** to check on the Doberman's health. There was nothing wrong with the animal, Wyatt told her, except for minor malnutrition and dehydration. It had been fed, exercised, and put into one of the larger cages.

She looked in on it. The dog seemed glad to see her; the stub of a tail began to wag when she approached the cage. She played her fingers through the mesh grille, let the Doberman nuzzle them.

While she was doing that the kennel attendant, a young redhead named Lena Stark, came out of the dispensary. "Hi, Jill," she said. "The patient looks pretty good, doesn't he?"

"He'll look a lot better when he find him a decent owner."

"That's for sure."

"Funny thing — he's registered to the Fox Hollow Kennels, but they say he was sold to one Edward Benham. It was Benham's garage he was locked up in."

"Why is that funny?"

"Well, purebred Dobermans don't come cheap. Why would anybody who'd pay for one suddenly go off and desert him?"

"I guess that is kind of odd," Lena admitted. "Unless Benham was called out of town on an urgent matter or something. That would explain it."

"Maybe," Jill said.

"Some people should never own pets, you know? Benham should have left the dog at Fox Hollow; at least they care about the welfare of animals."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because every now and then one of their guys comes in and takes most of our strays."

"Oh? For what reason?"

"They train them and then find homes for them in other parts of the state. A pretty nice gesture, don't you think?"

"Yes," Jill said thoughtfully. "A pretty nice gesture."

**SHE WENT INSIDE AND STRAIGHT TO THE FILING ROOM**, where she pulled the Fox Hollow folder. At her desk she spread out the kennel's animal licensing applications and studied them. It stood to reason that there would be a large number and there were; but as she sifted through them Jill was struck by a peculiarity. Not counting the strays Fox Hollow had "adopted" from the Agency, which by law had

to be vaccinated and licensed before being released, there were less than dozen dogs brought in and registered over the past twelve months. For a kennel which claimed to specialize in purebreds, this was suspiciously odd. Yet no one else had noticed it in the normal bureaucratic shuffle, just as no one had paid much attention to Fox Hollow's gathering of Agency strays.

And why was Fox Hollow in the market for so many stray dogs? Having met Fargo, she doubted that he was the humanitarian type motivated by a desire to save mongrels from euthanasia, a dog's fate if kept unclaimed at the Agency for more than four days. No, it sounded as if he were in some sort of strange wholesale pet business — as if the rest of the state, not to mention the rest of the country, didn't have their own animal overpopulation problems.

But where did Edward Benham, and the Doberman, fit in? Jill reviewed the Benham file again, but it had nothing new to tell her. She wished she knew where he'd gone, or of some way to get in touch with him. The obvious way, of course, was through his place of employment; unfortunately, however, pet license applications did not list employment of owners, only home address and telephone number. Nor had any of his neighbors known where he worked.

Briefly she considered trying to bluff information out of one of the credit-reporting companies in the city. Benham had bought rather than rented or leased his house, which meant that he probably carried a mortgage, which meant credit, which meant an application listing his employment. The problem was that legitimate members of such credit companies used special secret numbers to identify themselves when requesting information, so any ruse she might attempt would no doubt fail, and might even backfire and land her in trouble with Mortisse.

Then she thought of Pete Olafson, the office manager for Mid-Valley Adjustment Bureau, a local bad-debt collection service. Mid-Valley could certainly belong to a credit-reporting company. And she knew Pete pretty well, had dated him a few times in recent months. There wasn't any torrid romance brewing between her and the sandy-haired bachelor, but she knew he liked her a good deal — maybe enough to bend the rules a little and check Benham's credit as a favor.

She looked up Mid-Valley's number, dialed it, and was talking to Pete fifteen seconds later. "You must be a mind-reader, Jill," he said after she identified herself. "I was going to call you later. The University Theater is putting on 'Our Town' tomorrow night and I've wrangled a couple of free passes. Would you like to go?"

"Sure. If you'll do me a favor in return."

Pete sighed dramatically. "Nothing is free these days, it seems. Okay, what is it?"

"I want to know where a man named Edward Benham is employed. Could you track down his credit applications and find out from them?"

"I can if he's got credit somewhere."

"Well, he owns his own home, out in Oregon Estates. The name is Benham, B-e-n-h-a-m, Edward. How fast can you find out for me?"

"It shouldn't take long. Sit tight; I'll get back to you."

JILL REPLACED THE HANDSET and sat with her chin propped in one palm brooding. If the lead to Edward Benham through Pete didn't pan out, then what? Talk to his neighbors again? Through them she could find out the name of the real estate agent who had sold Benham his home . . . but it was unlikely that they would divulge personal information about him, since she had no official capacity. Talk to Fargo again? That probably wouldn't do her any good either . . .

The door to Lloyd Mortisse's private office opened; Jill saw him thrust his wild-maned head out and look in her direction. It was not a look of pleasure. "Ms. Quarter-Moon," he said. "Come into my office, please."

Jill complied. Mortisse shut the door behind her, sat down at his desk, and glared at her. "I thought," he said stiffly, "that I told you not to go out to Fox Hollow Kennels."

Surprised, Jill asked, "How did you know about that?"

"Mr. Fargo called me. He wanted to know why you were out there asking all sorts of questions. He wasn't particularly pleased by your visit; neither am I. Why did you disobey me?"

"I felt the trip was necessary."

"Oh, you felt it was necessary. I see. That makes it all right, I suppose."

"Look, Mr. Mortisse — "

"I do not like disobedience," Mortisse said. "I won't stand for it again, is that clear? Nor will I stand for you harassing private facilities like Fox Hollow. This Agency's sole concern in the Benham matter is to house the Doberman for ninety-six hours or until it is claimed. And I'll be the one, not you, to decide if any misdemeanor animal-abuse charges are to be filed against Mr. Benham."

Jill thought that it was too bad these weren't the old days, when one of the Umatilla customs in tribal disputes was to hold a potlatch — a fierce social competition at which rival chiefs gave away or destroyed large numbers of blankets, coppers, and slaves in an effort to outdo and therefore vanquish each other. She would have liked nothing

better than to challenge Mortisse in this sort of duel, using bureaucratic attitudes and red tape as the throwaway material. She also decided there was no point in trying to explain her suspicions to him; he would only have said in his supercilious way that none of it was Agency business. If she was going to get to the bottom of what was going on at Fox Hollow, she would have to do it on her own.

"Do you understand?" Mortisse was saying. "You're to drop this matter and attend to your assigned duties. And you're not to disobey a direct order again, under any circumstances."

"I understand," Jill said thinly. "Is that all?"

"That's all."

She stood and left the office, resisting an impulse to slam the door. The wall clock said that it was 4:10 — less than an hour until quitting time for the weekend. All right, she thought as she crossed to her desk. I'll drop the matter while I'm on Agency time. But what I do and where I go on my own time is *my* business, Mortisse or no Mortisse.

IT WAS ANOTHER TEN MINUTES, during which time she typed up a pair of two-day-old reports, before Pete Olafson called her back. "Got what you asked for, Jill," he said. "Edward Benham has a pretty fair credit rating, considering he's modestly employed."

"What does he do?"

"He's a deliveryman, it says here. For a kennel."

Jill sat up straight. "Kennel?"

"That's right," Pete said. "Place called Fox Hollow outside the city. Is that what you're after?"

"It's a lot more than I expected," Jill told him. Quickly she arranged tomorrow night's date with him, then replaced the receiver and sat mulling over this latest bit of news.

If she had needed anything more to convince her that something was amiss at Fox Hollow, this was it. Fargo had claimed he didn't know Edward Benham; now it turned out that Benham worked for Fargo. Why had he lied? What was he trying to cover up? And where was Benham? And where did the Doberman fit in?

She spent another half hour at her desk, keeping one eye on the clock and pretending to work while she sorted through questions, facts, and options in her mind. At ten minutes of five, when she couldn't take any more of the inactivity, she went out into the kennel area to see Lena Stark.

"Release the Doberman to me, will you, Lena?" she asked. "I'll bring him back later tonight and check him in with the night attendant."

"Why do you want him?"

"I like his looks and I want to get better acquainted. If it turns out neither Fox Hollow nor Benham decides to claim him, I may just adopt him myself."

"I don't know, Jill . . ."

"He's all right, isn't he? Sam Wyatt said he was."

"Sure, he's fine. But the rules —"

"Oh, hang the rules. Nobody has to know except you and me and the night attendant. I'll take full responsibility."

"Well . . . okay, I guess you know what you're doing."

Lena opened the cage and the Doberman came out, stubby tail quivering, and nuzzled Jill's hand. She led it out through the rear door, into the parking lot to where her compact was parked. Obediently, as if delighted to be free and in her company, the dog jumped onto the front seat and sat down with an expectant look.

Jill stroked its ears as she drove out of the lot. "I don't want to keep calling you 'boy,'" she said. "I think I'll give you a name, even if it's only temporary. How about Tyee?" In the old Chinook jargon, the mixed trade language of Indians and whites in frontier days, *tyee* was the word for chief. "You like that? Tyee?"

The dog cocked its head and made a rumble sound in its throat.

"Good," Jill said. "Tyee it is."

SHE DROVE ACROSS THE CITY AND INTO OREGON ESTATES. Edward Benham's house, she saw when she braked at the end of the cul-de-sac, looked as deserted as it had this morning. This was confirmed when she went up and rang the doorbell several times without getting a response.

She took Tyee with her and let him sniff around both front and back. The Doberman showed none of the easy familiarity of a dog on its own turf; rather, she sensed a wary tenseness in the way he moved and keened the air. And when she led him near the garage he bristled, made low growling noises. He was as much a stranger here as she was, Jill thought. But then why had he been locked in Benham's garage?

She would have liked to go inside for a better look around, but the locksmith had relocked the doors, as dictated by law, before leaving the premises that morning. The house was securely locked too, as were each of the windows. And drawn drapes and blinds made it impossible to see into any of the rooms from outside.

Jill took Tyee back to her compact. She sat for a time, considering. Then she started the engine and pointed the car in an easterly direction.

IT WAS JUST SEVEN O'CLOCK WHEN SHE CAME UP the access drive to Fox Hollow Kennels and coasted to a stop on the gravel parking area near the main building. There were no other vehicles around, a *Closed* sign was propped in one dusty pane of the front door, and the complex had a deserted aura; even the dogs in the near kennels were quiet.

She got out, motioning for Tyee to stay where he was on the front seat. The setting sun hung above the tops of the pines straight ahead, bathing everything in a dark-orange radiance. Jill judged that there was about an hour of daylight left, which meant that an hour was all she would have to look around. Prowling in daylight was risky enough, though if she were seen she might be able to bluff her way out of trouble by claiming she had brought Tyee back to his registered owner. If she were caught here after dark, no kind of bluff would be worth much.

The office door was locked, but when she shook it, it rattled loosely in its frame. Jill bent for a closer look at the latch. It was a spring-type lock, rather than a deadbolt. She straightened again, gnawing at her lower lip. Detectives in movies and on TV were forever opening spring locks with credit cards or pieces of celluloid; there was no reason why she couldn't do the same thing. No reason, that was, except that it was illegal and would cost her her job, if not a prison term, were she to be caught. She could imagine Lloyd Mortisse smiling like a Cheshire Cat at news of her arrest.

But she was already here, and the need to sate her curiosity was overpowering. The debate with her better judgment lasted all of ten seconds. Then she thought: Well, fools rush in — and she went back to the car to get a credit card from her purse.

Less than a minute of maneuvering with the card rewarded her with a sharp click as the lock snapped free. The door opened under her hand. Enough of the waning orange sunlight penetrated through the windows, she saw when she stepped inside, so that she didn't need any other kind of light. She went straight to the filing cabinets, began to shuffle through the folders inside.

The kennel records were in something of a shambles; Jill realized quickly that it would take hours, maybe even days, to sort through all the receipts, partial entries, and scraps of paper. But one file was complete enough to hold her attention and to prove interesting. It consisted of truck expenses — repair bills, oil company credit card receipts, and the like — and what intrigued her was that, taken to-

gether, they showed that the Fox Hollow delivery truck consistently traveled to certain towns in Oregon, northern California, and southern Washington. Forest Grove, Corvallis, Portland, McMinnville, Ashland, La Grande, Arcata, Kirkland . . . . These, and a few others, comprised a regular route.

Which might explain why Edward Benham was nowhere to be found at the moment; some of the towns were at least an overnight's drive away, and it was Benham's signature that was on most of the receipts. But the evident truck route also raised more questions. Why such long hauls for a small kennel? Why to some points out of state? And why to these particular towns, when there were numerous others of similar size along the way?

"Curiouser and curiouser," Jill murmured to herself.

She shut the file drawers and turned to the desk. Two of the drawers were locked; she decided it would be best not to try forcing them. None of the other drawers, nor any of the clutter spread across the top, told her anything incriminating or enlightening.

The door to the adjacent workroom was closed, but when she tried the knob it opened right up. That room was dimmer but there was still enough daylight filtering in to let her see the tools, workbench, stacks of lumber, finished and unfinished crates. She picked through the farago of items on the bench; caught up slats and corner posts of an unassembled cage, started to put them down again. Then, frowning, she studied one of the wooden posts more carefully.

The post was hollow. So were the others; the inner lengths of all four had been bored out by a large drill bit. When fitted into the frame of a fully constructed cage the posts would appear solid, their holes concealed by the top and bottom sections. Only when the cage was apart, like now, would the secret compartments be exposed, to be filled or emptied.

Of what?

Jill renewed her search. In a back corner were three rolls of cage wire — and caught on a snag of mesh on one roll was a small cellophane bag. The bag was out of easy sight and difficult to reach, but she managed to retrieve it. It looked new, unopened, and it was maybe 3x5 inches in size. The kind of bag —

And then she knew. All at once, with a kind of wrenching insight, she understood what the bag was for, why the corner posts were hollowed out, what Fox Hollow was involved in. And it was ugly enough and frightening enough to make her feel a chill of apprehension, make her want to get away from there in a hurry. It was more than she had bargained for — considerably more.

SHE RAN OUT OF THE WORKROOM, STILL CLUTCHING the cellophane bag in her left hand. At the office door she peered through the glass before letting herself out, to make sure the parking area remained deserted. Then she set the button-lock on the knob, stepped outside, pulled the door shut, and started across to her compact.

Tyee was gone.

She stopped, staring in at the empty front seat. She had left the driver's window all the way down and he must have jumped out. Turning, she peered through gathering shadows toward the kennels. But the dogs were still quiet back there, and they wouldn't be if the Doberman had gone prowling in that direction. Where, then? Back down the drive? The pine woods somewhere?

Jill hesitated. The sense of urgency and apprehension demanded that she climb into the car, Tyee or no Tyee, and drive away pronto. But she couldn't just leave him here while she went to tell her suspicions to the county sheriff. The law would not come out here tonight no matter what she told them; they'd wait until tomorrow, when the kennel was open for business and when they could obtain a search warrant. And once she left here herself she had no intention of coming back again after dark.

She moved away from the car, toward the dark line of evergreens beyond. It was quiet here, with dust settling, and sounds carried some distance; the scratching noises reached her ears when she was still twenty paces from the woods. She'd heard enough dogs digging into soft earth to recognize the sound and she quickened her pace. Off to one side was a beaten-down area, not quite a path, and she went into the trees at that point. The digging sounds grew louder. Then she saw Tyee, over behind a decayed moss-festooned log, making earth and dry needles fly out behind him with his forepaws.

"What are you doing?" she called to him. "Come here, Tyee."

The Doberman kept on digging, paying no attention to her. She hurried over to him, around the bulky shape of the log. And then she stopped abruptly, made a startled gasping sound.

A man's arm and clenched hand lay partially uncovered in the soft ground.

Tyee was still digging, still scattering dirt and pine needles. Jill stood frozen, watching part of a broad back encased in a khaki shirt appear.

Now she knew what had happened to Edward Benham.

She made herself move, step forward and catch hold of the Doberman's collar. He resisted at first when she tried to tug him away from

the shallow grave and what was in it; but she got a firmer grip and pulled harder, and finally he quit struggling. She dragged him around the log, back out of the trees.

Most of the daylight was gone now; the sky was grayish, streaked with red, like bloody fingermarks on faded cloth. A light wind had come up and she felt herself shiver as she took the Doberman toward her compact. She was anything but a shrinking violet, but what she had found at Fox Hollow tonight was enough to frighten Old Chief Joseph or any of the other venerable Shahaptian warriors. The sooner she was sitting in the safety of the Laurel County Sheriff's office, the better she —

And the sudden figure of a man came out from behind her car.

SHE WAS TEN FEET FROM THE DRIVER'S DOOR, her right hand on Tyee's collar, and the man just rose up into view like Nashlah, the legendary monster of the Columbia River. Jill made an involuntary cry, stiffened into a standstill. The Doberman seemed to go as tense as she did; a low rumble sounded in his throat as the man came toward them.

Fargo. With a gun in his hand.

"You just keep on holding that dog," he said. He stopped fifteen feet away, holding the gun out at arm's length. "You're both dead if you let go his collar."

She was incapable of speech for five or six seconds. Then she made herself say, "There's no need for that gun, Mr. Fargo. I'm only here to return the Doberman . . . ."

"Sure you are. Let's not play games. You're here because you're a damned snoop. And I'm here because you tripped a silent alarm connected to my house when you broke into the office."

It was not in Jill's nature to panic in a crisis; she got a grip on her fear and held it down, smothered it. "The office door was unlocked," she said. "Maybe you think you locked it when you left but you didn't. I just glanced inside."

"I don't buy that either," Fargo said. "I saw you come out of the office; I left my car down the road and walked up here through the trees. I saw you go into the woods over there, too."

"I went to find the dog, that's all."

"But that's not what you found, right? He's got dirt all over his forepaws — he's been doing some digging. You found Benham. And now you know too much about everything."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I say you do. So does that cellophane bag you're carrying."

Jill looked down at her left hand; she had forgotten all about the bag.

And she had never even considered the possibility of a silent alarm system. She had a lot to learn about being a detective — if she survived to profit by her mistakes.

"All right," she said. "It's drugs, isn't it? That's the filthy business you're in."

"You got it."

"Selling drugs to college kids all over the Pacific Northwest," she said. That was the significance of the towns on the Fox Hollow shipping route: they were all college or university towns. Humboldt State in Arcata, Lewis & Clark in Portland, Linfield College in McMinnville, Eastern Oregon College in La Grande. And the state university right here in this city. That was also why Fox Hollow had taken so many stray dogs from the Agency; they needed a constant supply to cover their shipment of drugs — cocaine and heroin, probably, the kind usually packaged and shipped in small cellophane bags — to the various suppliers along their network. "Where does it come from? Canada?"

"Mexico," Fargo said. "They bring it up by ship, we cut and package and distribute it."

"To kennels in those other cities, I suppose."

"That's right. They make a nice cover."

"What happens to the dogs you ship?"

"What do you think happens to them? Dogs don't matter when you're running a multi-million-dollar operation. Neither do snoops like you. Nobody fouls up this kind of operation and gets away with it."

Tyee growled again, shifted his weight; Jill tightened her grip on his collar. "Did Benham foul it up? Is that why he's dead?"

"He tried to. His percentage wasn't enough for him and he got greedy; he decided to hijack a shipment for himself — substitute milk sugar and then make off with the real stuff. When he left here on Wednesday for Corvallis he detoured over to his house and made the switch. Only one of the crates had the drugs in it, like always; he had to let the dog out of that one to get at the shipment and it turned on him, tried to bite him."

"This dog, the Doberman."

"Yeah. He managed to lock it up inside his garage, but that left him with an empty crate and he couldn't deliver an empty, not without making the Corvallis contact suspicious. So he loaded his own dog, the Husky, inside the crate and delivered it instead. But our man checked the dope anyway, discovered the switch, and called me. I was waiting for Benham when he got back here."

"And you killed him."

Fargo shrugged. "I had no choice."

"Like you've got no choice with me?"

He shrugged again. "I forgot all about the Doberman, that was my mistake. If I hadn't, I wouldn't have you on my hands. But it just didn't occur to me the dog would raise a ruckus and a nosy Agency worker would decide to investigate."

"Why did you lie to me before about knowing Benham?"

"I didn't want you doing any more snooping. I figured if I gave you that story about selling him the Doberman, you'd come up against a dead-end and drop the whole thing. Same reason I called your supervisor: I thought he'd make you drop it. Besides, you had no official capacity. It was your word against mine."

"Lying to me was your second mistake," Jill said. "If you kill me, it'll be your third."

"How do you figure that?"

"I told somebody I came out here tonight. He'll go to the county sheriff if I disappear, and they'll come straight to you."

"That's a bluff," Fargo said. "And I don't bluff. You didn't tell anybody about coming here; nobody knows but you and me. And pretty soon it'll just be me." He made a gesture with the gun. "Look at it this way. You're only one person, but I got a lot of people depending on me: others in the operation, all those kids we supply."

All those kids, Jill thought, and there was a good hot rage inside her now. College kids, some of them still in their teens. White kids, black kids — Indian kids. She had seen too many Indian youths with drug habits; she had talked to the parents of a sixteen-year-old boy who had died from an overdose of heroin on the Umatilla reservation, of a seventeen-year-old girl, an honor student, killed in a drug raid at Trout Lake near the Warm Springs development. Any minority, especially its restless and sometimes disenchanted youth, was susceptible to drug exploitation; and Indians were a minority long oppressed in their own country. That was why she hated drugs, and hated these new oppressors, the drug dealers like Fargo, even more.

Fargo said, "Okay, we've done enough talking — no use in prolonging things. Turn around, walk into the woods."

"So you can bury me next to Benham?"

"Never mind that. Just move."

"No," she said, and she let her body go limp, sank onto her knees. She dropped the cellophane bag as she did so and then put that hand flat on the gravel beside her, keeping her other hand on Tyee's collar. The Doberman, sensing the increase of tension between her and Fargo, had his fangs bared now, growling steadily.

"What the hell?" Fargo said. "Get up."

Jill lowered her chin to her chest and began to chant in a soft voice — a Shahaptian prayer.

"I said get up!"

She kept on chanting.

Fargo took two steps toward her, a third, a fourth. That put less than five feet of ground between them. "I'll shoot you right where you are, I mean it — "

SHE SWEPT UP A HANDFUL OF GRAVEL, hurled it at his face, let go of Tyee's collar, and flung herself to one side.

The gun went off and she heard the bullet strike the ground near her head, felt the sting of a pebble kicked up against her cheek. Then Fargo screamed, and when Jill rolled over she saw that Tyee had done what she'd prayed he would — attacked Fargo the instant he was released. He had driven the man backward and knocked him down and was shaking his captured wrist as if it were a stick; the gun had popped loose and sailed off to one side. Fargo cried out again, tried to club the Doberman with his free hand. Blood from where Tyee's teeth had bitten into his wrist flowed down along his right arm.

Jill scrambled to her feet, ran to where the gun lay and scooped it up. But before she could level it at Fargo, he jackknifed his body backwards, trying to escape from the Doberman, and cracked his head against the front bumper of her compact; she heard the thunking sound it made in the stillness, saw him go limp. Tyee still straddled the inert form, growling, shaking the bloody wrist.

She went over there, caught the dog's collar again, talked to him until he let go of Fargo and backed off with her. But he stood close, alert, alternately looking at the unconscious man and up at her. She knelt and hugged him, and there were tears in her eyes. She disliked women who cried, particularly self-sufficient Indian women, but sometimes . . . sometimes it was a necessary release.

"You know who you are?" she said to him. "You're not Tyee, you're Coyote. You do battle with monsters and evil beings and you save Indians from harm."

The Doberman licked her hand.

"The Great One isn't supposed to return until the year 2000, when the world changes again and all darkness is gone; but you're here already and I won't let you go away. You're mine and I'm yours from now on — Coyote and Quarter-Moon."

Then she stood, shaking but smiling, and went to re-pick the lock on the office door so she could call the Laurel County sheriff.

*I don't know what to make of it all. When I think about it now, I get the heebie-jeebies, but damned if I'll believe that craziness Gardner was trying to sell me. It just couldn't be. Still . . .*

# The Soul Ghoul

by JOE R. LANSDALE

IT STARTED ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO.

We sat before Gardner's mammoth fireplace in his over stuffed chairs and drank wine. Gardner always kidded that the fireplace was large enough to roast a hog in, and it was. It was as large and ornate as the rest of the house.

Gardner had the loot, you see. He was a paperback artist, and a successful one. Had an agent in New York and everything. Big time fella. I sometimes wondered what he saw in me. I was pretty crude

compared to him. Said himself that I had primitive tastes.

An example is, I'm not really a wine man. I like beer. Any kind of beer. Ice-cold to piss-warm. Put it in front of me, I'll drink it.

Gardner sais that's because I'm a redneck and an ex-boxer. Time after time he's said that boxing is a hooligan's way to make a living, and maybe drinking wine will give me a little refinement.

I doubted it at this late stage. Wasn't that much of a boxer anyway, just a payday fighter from San Antonio. I'd spent most of the time with my ass on the canvas, so about two years back I'd given it up. Moved here to Nacogdoches, Texas where a lot of my relatives live, opened up a janitorial service with my uncle. He does the books; I supervise the folks.

Anyway, Gardner has this sort of odd-ball Continental charm about him, and wine suits him to a tee. So we drank that.

THIS PARTICULAR NIGHT WE'D HAD SO MUCH OF THE STUFF, I was even starting to like it. He poured us both another glass, put the bottle by his chair, leaned back and said, "You believe in the supernatural, Rocky?" (Rocky's my nickname, after Marciano, of course).

"That sort of came out of left field," I said.

"Just got to thinking. Do you?"

"No," I said. "You know me, old redneck. If I can't see it, hit it or bed it, it doesn't exist."

Gardner smiled and drank a sip from his wine. The fire sputtered in the hearth, lent some flickering shadow to his face, made his eyes look unnaturally bright.

Meko, his scruffy black cat strolled out of the dark — we liked to sit in front of the fire with the lights off — and leaped onto Gardner's lap. He stroked her head solemnly. "I do," he said. "I believe . . . in something."

"Not me. No spirits besides those in a bottle as far as I'm concerned. When you're dead you're dead. Just you and the worms for a while, and after a bit, just the worms."

Gardner scratched Meko gently behind the ears. She purred. If there was one thing Gardner really loved, it was that cat.

"Did I ever tell you what I used to do, Rocky? The work I did?"

"No. Guess I thought you were always a painter."

"Well, I've always painted, and I love it, but before I moved here from Houston I was a psychiatrist."

"You're joking?"

"No. I sort of got . . . drummed out of the business, I guess you could say." He smiled at me with those very white, capped teeth of his.

"I enjoyed the psychiatric profession almost as well as my painting."  
"Why'd you quit then?"

"I said I was drummed out of the business, and I meant that. My colleagues thought I was whacko. Don't smile. Lots of psychiatrists are nuts. But don't worry, I'm not one of them. It was my belief, in what we casually refer to as the supernatural, that got me in trouble with the profession.

"You see, Rocky, I thought the supernatural, or as I prefer to call it, the paranormal, was, and is, just another branch of science we've yet to understand or explain."

Outside, the December wind had picked up, and the first tentative fingers of a cold rain scratched at the roof.

"I don't believe in the supernatural," I said, "but I don't see how you believing in it would get you run out of the business."

"It's witch doctor stuff to them, Rocky. Doesn't mix well with the image. As a psychiatrist, I dealt with all manner of problems. For all the people who came to see me, who needed help, I was only able to really do a handful some good. That was depressing.

"But what really bothered me were those sent to me by the state. Those that I call 'spontaneous psychopaths.' It was this type that directed me toward my theories."

"Theories?"

"These are the sort of folks that seem like normal citizens, show no sign of abnormal behavior, and suddenly they blow. They're the Charles Whitman's who climb in towers and rain bullets down on innocent people for no apparent reason. The Mark David Chapmans who step from the shadows to kill public figures against whom they have no grudge. Or the Gary Gilmores who kill and seem totally perplexed at what they've done, even insist that they be killed and put out of their misery, out of the way of society. These people are often glad to die, and I think there may well be a reason, a clue in that."

"I think I slept through part of this," I said. "Or maybe it's the wine. You're not making sense to me."

Gardner laughed. "That's what I like about you, Rocky. You're so damned down to Earth it helps me keep my feet on the ground, my head out of the clouds."

"Thanks . . . I think."

"What I'm saying is, these people often want to die because they realize that that's the only way they can get rid of . . . *this thing*."

"*This thing* meaning insanity?"

"Not exactly. There's a lot of badness in this world, Rocky. Some of it stems from greed, hate . . . even love. There's badness that develops

out of social problems, racial oppression, but what I'm talking about is something altogether different. I'm talking about true evil, Rocky."

"I think maybe if I had another glass of wine this would all start to make sense." I tipped the last of the bottle into my glass.

GARDNER GOT UP FROM HIS CHAIR AND PUT ANOTHER LOG on the fire, took a poker from the rack and pushed it well into the flames. Outside there was an explosive blast of thunder that shook the house and charged the air with electricity.

"What if outside this world as we know it, something waits," Gardner said, hanging the poker in the rack next to the scoop shovel. "A force so elemental it's beyond our understanding. A creature. A thing. Something I've come to call the soul ghoul."

"Soul ghoul?"

Gardner returned to his seat.

"These senseless murders. Why does a normal person spring off the deep end like that, without warning? That's what perplexed me, and I began to pursue the problem, turned to everything I could find for an answer. Even areas where my colleagues refused to look. The occult. I read up on it. Attended seances, examined it inside out.

"A lot of it's crap, Rocky. No doubt. But I came away feeling that the basic belief that something lies beyond has been with us since the beginning of man, and for good reason. Exorcism and possession first led me to my conclusions. How I arrived at them is rather tedious, but suffice to say I began to believe there was a parasite of sorts that fed on the emotional trauma of men, the energy that one expends in the process of performing fearful deeds, and of course, in dying. The more traumatic the situation, the more energy we expend. And what more is the soul than energy from within?

"The soul Ghoul is like a mind without a body, a soul in search of a house. It uses a human being much like a rider uses a horse.

"Voodoo has an element of this. When a believer lets down his or her barriers, a spirit enters them. They call it the loa. There are both good and evil loas. Perhaps these evil loas are in fact the manifestation of the ghoul. Call it hysteria if you like, I think not."

"How could a person know what it was going to get? I mean, a good spirit or a bad?"

"He can't. But I believe this evil spirit, this ghoul of the soul, is attracted to certain types of people. People whose emotions run deep. Not necessarily intelligent people, or even kind people, but people with odd emotional stirrings that are quite different from their fellows; stirrings that make them game for this . . . *thing*."

"Once it possesses an individual it either uses them up until they are an emotionless, zombie-shell like Chapman, or the fear of it within them drives what remains of the person's personality to destroy *it* by destroying themselves. As in Gilmore's case."

"Interesting theory, but a bit difficult to prove, Gardner."

"Unless one were willing to extend himself, open the way for this ghoul, examine its actions from within."

"If there is such a thing, and I don't believe it for a minute, wouldn't that be risky? Once it was hold of you . . ."

"Maybe. But there are preparations. Things that have come to be called white magic; spells, diagrams and such for warding off evil spirits. It is my belief that there is some scientific reasoning for these things driving back evil forces, that it's not magic at all, just something we call magic for lack of understanding. Whatever it is, it must work, and I have considerable knowledge of these things."

"You?"

"Yes, I want to open the way."

"All right, you want to open the way. How?"

"Ever play with a Ouija board, Rocky?"

"No. I know what it is though. Nonsense."

"Perhaps." Gardner stood up and motioned to me. "Come, into the dining room. I want to show you something."

RELUCTANTLY, I GOT OUT OF MY CHAIR AND FOLLOWED HIM to the dining room, which was about the size of my apartment over on Pearl Street. Gardner flipped on the light and except for a table and chairs, and a Ouija board on the far end of the table, it was bare. Of furniture, anyway. The place stank of incense. There were candles of incense in each corner of the room and they sputtered and flickered and gave off an odor like a dog's armpit. On the walls in bold, black lines diagrams had been drawn. A huge circle was drawn around the table in white chalk.

"The candles, the diagrams, the spell I'll chant, they are the most important part of this. The Ouija is merely a doorway."

Meko lazily followed us into the room, and Gardner bent down to scratch her behind the ears. "That'll hold her," he said.

Gardner stepped inside the circle, took a chair in front of the Ouija, placed his fingers on the triangular piece of plastic that serves as the message indicator. I sat on his left.

"Say this is real," I said, "what happens if we just get someone's Aunt Harriet, or one of those mischievous ghosts, what do you call them?"

"Poltergeists. Hey, there may be hope for you yet, Rocky. As for Aunt Harriet, I've been experimenting for the last week now, and I've already made contact with this spirit, the one I call the soul ghoul. I feel certain that it's the ghoul; its evil weighs on me like a boulder."

"Come on, Gardner . . . "

"Therefore, it's easier to contact each time. One thing, Rocky, will you get the lights?"

I got up and turned them out, resumed my seat. I was getting a bit impatient with all this. "Let's get on with it already," I said.

Gardner began to chant. The words were all nonsense to me. Maybe it was Greek or Latin, or both, but after a while he said in English, "Are you there?"

Nothing happened. There was only the sound of the storm outside, picking up in ferocity. Beyond the windows lightning spread needles of gold fire across the sky; rain, whipped by the wind, sputtered against the window panes.

"Are you there?" Gardner repeated. "I am opening the way."

TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS, I GUESS IT WAS GETTING TO ME some. I looked at the window directly across from Gardner and saw eyes. Or what I thought were eyes. They were the beams of some car passing on the road outside, and in a moment they passed on.

"Are you — " and then I heard the scrape of the indicator on the polished wood of the Ouiji board. When I looked, the indicator, Gardner's fingers resting lightly on top, was moving toward the left of the board, toward the word YES. It stopped there.

"Who are you?" Gardner asked.

The indicator began to move again, tracing its way over one letter after another, gaining momentum as it went. I AM I AM I AM it repeated.

"What do you want?" Gardner asked.

"YOU it spelled out immediately. THEM it spelled out after a short stall. Well, I thought. Ask a silly question, get a silly answer.

"What are you?"

Suddenly the triangle of plastic slid across the board, stretched Gardner's arms to their full length. The plastic slipped out from beneath his fingers and jetted along the smooth expanse of the table, catapulted through the air and struck the window, shattering it. The tail of the storm slipped in and slapped the room from wall to wall. I hadn't realized it was *that* cold outside.

"For the love of God," Gardner said softly.

I got up, turned on the lights and sat back down.

"Now . . . now," Gardner said, "do you believe?"

"Nothing to believe. Your subconscious did that, spelled out those words."

"And tossed the indicator out the window?"

"It slipped. You were tense and it slipped. The table is smooth, it skipped along it like a rock on a pond."

"That little plastic thing broke the window by itself?"

"Gained force as it went. Anything; if it's moving fast enough, can pack quite a wallop. Bantam weights for instance. They hit fast, and can hit hard because of it. It's not just weight and muscle, its momentum."

Gardner put his head down on the Ouija. "Just like them," he said.

"Trying to tell it like I see it is all . . . I'm a friend."

"I know, Rocky. Sorry."

I sat quietly for a moment then stood up. "Better get that window patched over. It's going to be a cold one tonight. I'll call you later."

"Sure."

Meko was in the den. She must have found the goings on in the dining room too silly for her taste. I scratched her behind the ears in agreement and went out to my car.

I'M NOT BIG ON THE SORT OF CRAP GARDNER WAS FEEDING me, but it got me to thinking. And besides I was worried about the scrawny rascal. Thought maybe he was starting to cling to the rim. I even went so far as to go to the public library and study up some.

Found books on ghosts, demons, ghouls, you name it. I went from occult explanations — which were downright silly — to scientific ones. What I got out of it from the scientific end was stuff like Ouijas and poltergeists — which as far as could be told from investigation — were the results of the mind, the subconscious. Which is just what I thought all along. A sort of mental wish fulfillment, I guess you'd say, or perhaps the results of emotional stress. It was a kind of self-hypnosis, and everyone knows strange things happen under hypnosis. Like a hypnotist telling a subject that they've just poured boiling water on their arm, and suddenly blisters pop up. Strange stuff.

I worried about Gardner for a while, but finally decided he was just under strain. Besides, Gardner was a weird duck anyway. Next time I saw him he'd be off this ghoul stuff.

Or so I thought.

IT WAS ABOUT THREE WEEKS BEFORE GARDNER AND I GOT together again. I never did get around to phoning him, just went over

there one night uninvited with a bottle of wine and a six-pack.

There wasn't a light on in the house. At first I thought he wasn't home, but the Buick was in the garage poking its butt out shyly at the night.

I parked, went up the walk and knocked, then remembered the bell. When I was growing up, we lived in the country and it was rare to find a house with a bell. Everybody knocked. So I'd never quite gotten used to doorbells.

I pushed the bell a couple of times, but no answer. After a minute or two had passed, I yelled Gardner's name, and still getting no response, I tried the door. It was unlocked. I went in.

The place had a musty odor, like maybe it had been shut up for a while without sunlight and fresh air. Silence crawled through the house like something alive. It was smoky too. A green log smouldered in the fireplace, churned out black smoke like rubber burning. But that was Gardner. He didn't know soft wood from hard, pine from walnut.

"Gardner," I yelled, and my voice seemed to travel uncertainly through the house.

"Rocky?" came Gardner's voice; it was weak and whispery, came from the dining room. I went on in there and found Gardner sitting at the table where I had last seen him.

I turned on the light. The Ouija was in front of him again, only this time it was cracked half in two. Gardner had not fixed the broken window and cold wind whipped into the room and lashed at me like a wet crocodile tail. The hardwood floor in front of the window was warped up a bit from where the rain had blown in, and it looked to have blown away most of the white chalk circle. Even the diagrams on the walls looked to have faded. The candles were out and the odor in the room was not due to that nasty incense. It was something else. Breeze down from the fertilizer plant, I reckoned. Bad stuff.

Gardner was a changed man. It was as if someone had bleached him. His face was as white as a starlet's teeth, his eyes had more red streaks than a chicken yard had scratches, and his hair had that combed with an egg beater look.

I walked over to the table and sat down, reached out and touched Gardner's hand. My own hand came away damp . . . bloody. Gardner's wrist was cut up pretty bad.

"What happened, Gardner?"

"Meko."

"Meko did this? Why she's as gentle as a . . ." and then I saw her. She was lying against the wall on Gardner's right. It was as if she had been flung there like a wet dish rag. Her head was dangling at an

impossible angle, as if it had been screwed half way off, and her tongue drooped from her mouth, looked a foot long.

"What happened," I asked.

"The ghoul," Gardner said. "It made me do it . . . just a little cat's soul, but it wanted to feed; it wanted the energy of something alive. Couldn't help it, Rocky, I swear. I didn't want to, but the ghoul wouldn't leave me alone."

"Take it easy."

"The board . . . last time I summoned it, then tried to send it back, it split the board . . . It was showing me I no longer had control." He reached over and took hold of my shirt front. "It's *inside me*, Rocky. Fought it all I could, kept it at bay, but it's getting stronger . . . The spells, the diagrams. They won't hold it."

"Easy, pal." I finally got him out of the dining room and into the den, into one of those big chairs in front of the fireplace. I fixed up the fire some, went out and got the beer and wine. After a glass of the wine he seemed to calm down a bit.

"I've pulled it out of there," Gardner said. "I've unleashed the goddamn parasite and it's feeding on me. I feel like I'm inside a husk looking out sometimes . . . like I can't control my actions. Actually saw it . . . me, take hold of Meko and . . . God! It's got me, Rocky." Suddenly he was keyed up again.

"Have some more wine." I poured him another glass and he upended it.

"It soaked up Meko's energy like a sponge soaks up water. It was terrible . . . exhilarating in a way . . . Evil, Rocky, very evil."

"You're tired, Gardner. Meko scratched you . . . you're not quite yourself."

"I didn't kill Meko," Gardner said at the top of his lungs. "You've got to believe me, Rocky. If you don't I'll lose my mind. It's like that writer, Lovecraft . . . things are out there . . . waiting, just waiting to slip through time and space into this world. I've let one through, and my body is the gate. When the emotions are up, the ghoul feeds, and then when the emotions die down, the 'gate' starts to close. It gets sucked back, back to the abysmal darkness beyond this world."

"I was a fool to try and open the way, to let myself be a sort of human sacrifice, just because I was curious."

A horrible thing went through my mind: *Curiosity killed the cat!*

"Listen, Gardner. It feeds off emotional stress, right? Well, if you take it easy, if you let the stress die out cold, can it survive?"

"I don't think so . . . It can at least be controlled."

"Then try and relax." I knew I was talking crazy, but Gardner

wasn't going to listen to logic. He was too flipped out. I poured him another glass of wine, and somehow we managed to slip away from the subject and into other matters.

An hour later we were talking rapidly about anything and everything under the sun — except the supernatural. When Gardner seemed to have himself pretty well together, we buried Meko and cleaned the blood off the wall and tossed the Ouija fragment out.

As I was leaving for home Gardner said, "Thanks, Rocky."

"All right," I said. "You've just been working too hard. Stress. Get some rest."

He gave me a wan smile as I left him at the door. I drove away from there with a chill at my back like the North winds blow.

**YOU'VE SEEN THOSE ADS ABOUT PROBLEM DRINKERS.** The ones that ask the question: "If you let him drive home drunk, are you a real friend?"

What the ad's getting at, of course, is being a friend isn't always easy. It isn't a great lot of fun to tell your old pal that he's a goddamned sot and he ought not to drive home; ought not to walk home, for that matter, in a drunken condition. The good friend is supposed to do the driving for him, or make him sleep over, offer help in some sort of way.

That's what I should have done, and I feel guilty now. I blame myself for what happened to Gardner. Maybe I could have gotten him a head shrinker, someone who could have helped him with his problems. I like to think I didn't do that because I don't have much faith in those folks to begin with.

Whatever the excuse, there's no doubt I knew my friend Gardner was losing his grip. I was just foolish enough to think it might go away, like a cold or something. It's hard to admit that a friend's losing it, that his dough isn't done in the middle.

I laid low, didn't call Gardner, didn't go by. Deep down I probably didn't want to see him; didn't want to look at that wild look in his eyes, or hear him ramble on about elemental ghouls from beyond. Truth to tell, if it hadn't been for something I read in the papers, I might not have gone by there the night it happened.

I'm not much of a paper reader, and I guess by the time I got to the article it was a couple days old. Don't really remember.

Out back of this lumber yard they'd found the body of a college girl and her head was twisted on her neck like some sort of rubber doll's head. That made me think of poor Meko, the way she looked lying up against Gardner's dining room wall. The thing got to working in the

back of my mind like a dog scratching at a screen door, wanting to be let in.

But still, I didn't go over there.

A few days passed, and like before, a couple days late, I read the newspaper. Found out that there had been two more murders, each as ghastly as the first. One of the victims had been a college boy, the other a little girl. Same method of operation. No obvious motive.

I didn't like what I was thinking, but I couldn't put it out of my mind. Five minutes after I laid the paper down I was in my car, on my way to Gardner's.

**THE HOUSE WAS DARK AGAIN.** I got out of my Ford, walked on up to the door and started to knock. But didn't. I just didn't want to hear that hollow rap of my knuckles bouncing around inside that big old house — and maybe that wasn't entirely the reason. Something deep inside me seemed to say: "Boy, you better be quiet."

I went around to the back of the house and found a window that wasn't latched, pushed it up and crawled inside, just managing not to castrate myself on a nail sticking up in the window sill.

The inside of that room was like being inside someone's wool pocket. Couldn't even see my hand in front of my face.

Although I don't smoke, I carry matches. You use them in odd ways in the janitor business — checking corners for dust, that sort of thing. I peeled one out of the match book I carried and lit it.

I was in Gardner's art studio. I'd only been in there one other time when he'd shown me a painting he was doing for a Western paperback. Canvas made an alley wall on either side of me, and in the flickerings of the match, I could see the door that led into the hall and out into the rest of the house.

I started down between those canvassas and something caught my eye. About that time my match went out.

I lit another and held it close to the painting — for that's what had gotten my attention — and got a good look. It damn near turned my stomach, and I tell you true, I'm not a squeamish sort of guy. It was the painting of a woman, a man, a little girl and a cat. Each of them had their head's twisted at a crazy angle, tongues hanging out of their mouths and their eyes popping like huge pockets of puss.

When that match went out I lit another, moved it around to look at the other paintings. They all seemed to be of the same creature, but in different poses. The paintings seemed to represent some sort of huge whirlwind that was equipped with a horrible, toothy mouth. I had an idea what they were supposed to portray.

Poor Gardner had totally lost it. Those people, those horrible murders . . . I lit another match and moved toward the door that led to the hall:

Gardner stood in the doorway, a poker in his hand.

"Gardner, it's me."

He gritted his teeth and swung. I caught his wrist and pushed him out into the hall, up against the wall. His eyes burned into mine like blow torches. But most amazing was his strength.

Gardner is a slight man, small boned and delicate, but he tossed me off like a dog shaking rain from its coat. I went flying down the length of the hall, smashed into the door that led to the dining room.

Gardner stalked toward me like some sort of great, preying mantis, the poker swinging at his side.

I kicked out at him and hit him in the abdomen, knocked him back about a foot. Just enough to give me time to open the door into the dining room. At a dead run I palmed the table and went over it, and behind me came Gardner. He did the same, but with less effort. I didn't wait to see him land.

I went into the den and to the front door, but I couldn't get it open. Either the lock was jammed or I was fumbling.

I turned just in time to avoid the poker. The blow would have smashed my head like a water balloon. It went into the wood of the door and stuck, made an ear-shattering scrape that rocked me from head to heel.

Gardner struggled with the poker, but it was hung. I hit him with a left hook to the gut. Once I'd hit Archie Malone like that in a hard bout in Houston. He'd dropped to his knees like a five dollar whore, but Gardner, he kept standing. It just seemed to annoy him.

It did get him away from the poker though, and I gave him an overhand right to go with it. Must have broken his nose, but it didn't stop him. He forgot that poker, and as I wheeled away from the door, he came after me barehanded.

Gardner's face was not his own. It seemed as if it had been remoulded by crude and uncaring hands. The eyes were like sparks flickering with the firelight — for that ever-constant fire was blazing and smoking in the hearth. The teeth were drawn back in a horrible, ear to ear grin.

For the first time in my life, I was really scared.

"Gardner, I don't want to hurt you."

He came on quick and silent. I gave him another hook to the middle, landed a right cross above his left ear. It rocked him, but he didn't go down.

"Gardner!" I screamed, and for a moment it was as if he understood me, knew who I was. It was like something from within him was trying to grab the reins and whoa back.

"Rocky," he said weakly, "help me." And then the features that momentarily softened were washed away by a tide of fury and insanity.

I backed away, got around in front of one of those big chairs in front of the fireplace. Gardner reached out, grabbed the heavy chair and flung it halfway across the room, palmed my chest and knocked me up against the fireplace mantle. The flames licked at my back, scorched my hide through jacket and shirt. I swiveled to the left, away from the fire.

My hand touched something metal, and when I looked down, saw it was resting on the fire shovel in the poker rack. I jerked the shovel out of there and laid it hard upside Gardner's head.

Blood trickled down the side of his head, and those eyes blazed like bonfires in the hollows of a skull. They seemed to freeze me.

"Gardner, for the love of God!"

He was on me, his fingers buried in the lapels of my jacket. I tried to hit him with the shovel again, but I couldn't get in a good whack. Blood streamed down his face, and that horrible mask of hate was inches from my face, the teeth bared like some rabid dog . . . and then the face seemed to fold down like a jerked blind, and there was Gardner's face again, his eyes.

Maybe it was just the shadows there flickering in the firelight, but the demonic face and that of Gardner seemed to shift from second to second, and then Gardner pushed me from him and turned toward the great hearth. His legs coiled, and by the time I realized what he was about to do, it was too late. He leaped straight into the fire, and the flames, like fingers, seemed to reach out and grasp him.

I tried to pull him out, but he fought me. The last thing I remember was his face — Gardner's — and in spite of the damage the flames had done to it, it seemed at peace. But then maybe I'm just thinking after the fact, being melodramatic.

The fire wrapped him up and took him away, and what I managed to pull from there was hardly recognizable as a man.

THAT'S BEEN A WHILE NOW, BUT SOMETIMES I WAKE UP and see that face Gardner wore, or worse yet, I see him looking at me out of those flames, and then his blackened body lies before my eyes and I wake up.

No doubt about it, he wanted to die that way.

After the inquest a lot of stuff came out. Seems Gardner had been a

lot worse off than I'd known. Before moving to Nacogdoches he had been a psychiatrist, but he'd also spent some time in a mental institution; even back then the idea of a soul ghoul had eaten away his rationality. They released him as cured eventually, but . . . .

It doesn't matter now. Those horrible murders stopped. I put his paintings in the fire the night he died. Couldn't see much use in slandering the man's reputation further. There was some hullabaloo about me murdering him, but that didn't stick. The psychiatric stuff worked in my favor, and some others who knew him said he'd been acting awful strange.

Poor Gardner, he was as crazy as a moth in a jar. But the other day I read the paper, and they think they got the Yorkshire Ripper, a fellow more ghoulish than Jack ever was. Thirteen brutal murders to his credit.

What got me about the article was what was said by those who knew him. "He was a model son, a perfect husband."

Why do normal people fall off the house?

I don't have any answers, but Gardner's idea, the ghoul . . . . just too fantastic. Stuff like that just couldn't be.

Could it? ®

## MIKE'S MAIL

### THE LONG AND THE SHORT

The long vs the short story controversy rages on. I have strong feelings on the subject. Here's what I do when I receive my copy of MSMM. I flip through the pages and stop at the story that is only three or four pages long. I read that story first. Then I go on to the others, reading the longer short story at the very last.

I cannot get interested in the longer stuff. Remember the old Liberty Magazine? They even had short-short stories, vignettes. I'd like to see some one-pagers in MSMM.

I liked "Minute Mysteries" and "Strange But True."

Wonder how many readers feel as I do.

Mr. Fred Ebel  
375 Palm Springs Dr. Apt. 208  
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*He was tall and dark and handsome, with deep black eyes. As he placed her on the red satin, the necklace at her throat seemed to burn her skin.*

# The Easter Gathering

by ED OKONOWICZ

BRENDA PORCELLI WAS DESPERATELY IN NEED of a new apartment. Therefore, the ad in the university's Daily Pennsylvanian grabbed her attention.

Apartment for rent. Within walking distance of University. Utilities included. \$75.00 a month. **SINGLE FEMALES ONLY.** No males. No couples. Miss Gritts. 682-5971.

While cutting out the ad she reflected on the three hectic weeks of apartment hunting that she had just experienced with no satisfactory results. So using her recently acquired professionalism she narrowed

the listing into three possible categories: a come-on; a misprint; or a piece of manna from heaven.

Hoping for the latter, she called the number, was very obviously screened over the phone, and eventually given the final appointment of the day, at six-thirty that evening.

To Brenda, early March was the nicest time of year in Philadelphia. Winter was practically over and the grass and trees were starting to fight their way back to life.

The sky was just beginning to darken when she found the address, and she was startled by the imposing structure — a three-story mansion with huge, hard-carved, double doors; bay windows; numerous gables and gargoyles; and a genuine slate roof. Built in the 1880's, it was surrounded by a meticulous garden, goldfish pond, and brick walk-way. The entire compound was enclosed by a ten foot wall with broken glass embedded in the top.

As Brenda walked between the iron gates, her mind was filled with questions, but they were replaced by others of a different type when she pressed the doorbell and stared at the bronze wall plaque which read:

**CHANDLER L. DEPARTE  
FUNERAL HOME**

Before she could organize her thoughts, the door opened. "I'm Miss Gritts. Please follow me."

Brenda obeyed. Walking through the building gave her a chill, for she had always hated funeral homes. But curiosity helped overcome her reaction to leave when she followed her guide. Miss Gritts, about fifty, trim and well preserved, walked with a crisp, businesslike gait; her footsteps echoed across the rich marble floor.

In the main office, Brenda was introduced first to Mr. Chandler Departe, the owner, who looked a frail eighty-nine with a thin, chalky face and two bony claws which he kept rubbing together like a Boy Scout trying to start a fire.

Next to him was Mr. Roland DeParte. He was five times the size of his older brother, and what Chandler left on his dinner plate, Roland obviously took care of. At 5'7" and breathing on 300 pounds, Roland reminded Brenda of a well-fed Mayor of Munchkinland in the Wizard of Oz.

Roland's wife, Mrs. Cassandra DeParte was, like Miss Gritts, also well-preserved and resembled a victorian matron in her full red and black gown. If you substituted Mrs. Departe's frosted hair with a long red wig, she would have looked like a whorehouse madam.

None of them rose or spoke any greeting. Only condescending nods

were offered and Miss Gritts, standing between Brenda and the jury, broke the silence. Speaking crisply, with her hands clasped at the front of her waist, she began: "Miss Porcelli, the DeParte's are very interested in knowing all about their future tenant. Therefore, it is necessary that you answer a number of questions. If your responses are satisfactory, you will be shown the facilities and be offered the opportunity to reside here."

IMMEDIATELY, QUESTIONS CAME IN RAPID, STACCATO fashion from the family. They came so quickly that Brenda could not keep track of the initiators, so she ended up responding to the group.

"How old are you, dear?"

"Nineteen."

"Why do you want the apartment?"

"I need to live closer to the university."

"Why?"

"Because I'm a music major. An organist. And I have to go there often to practice and perform in recitals and concerts. A place so close would be — "

"Where do you live now?"

"At the other end of town. In Frankford."

"Do you have a roommate?"

"No."

"Any girlfriends?"

"No one really close."

"A boyfriend then?"

"No."

"Why not? You seem to be an attractive young thing." It was Roland who asked that question, licking his lips.

"Because I'm too involved with my music and I don't have any time for that."

"We will not permit you to bring young men into your apartment and entertain," stressed Mrs. DeParte.

"That's not a problem. And I've already explained I don't have any time for that — "

"Where were you born?"

"California."

"Does your family live there?"

"I have no family. My parents left me in the State Orphanage when I was born."

"How will you pay the rent? Where does your money come from?" asked Chandler, in his screeching voice.

"I think that's a personal question and I don't think that it's any of your business," said Brenda, getting impatient and obviously upset with the interrogation.

Sensing her annoyance, Miss Gritts intervened, "Miss Porcelli, please don't take these questions personally. We are simply trying to make sure that you are responsible and serious enough to be considered for the apartment. I'm sure you realize that these questions are the same type that would be asked on any rental application."

As Brenda nodded and relaxed, Miss Gritts continued, "Now just a few more questions. What is your birthdate?"

"March 3, 1960."

"And your bloodtype?" interjected Chandler.

"B positive. Why?"

"Just curious. I have a theory about birthdates and bloodtypes," he explained.

"You are Italian?"

"Yes; the records say my father's name was Porcelli. My mother was Italian also."

Tapping his cane on the floor, Chandler signaled to Miss Gritts that the interview was over. "You seem to have satisfied the DeParte's, and they would like me to show you your facilities."

THEY PASSED THROUGH SEVERAL LARGE PARLORS which were lavishly decorated with antiques, velvet curtains, polished wood paneling and thick carpets. Brenda was led through a solid oak door to a circular stairway. Ascending to the second floor they arrived at a long narrow hall with a single door at the far end. Unlocking it, Miss Gritts motioned for Brenda to enter.

Inside was a palatial suite containing an eat-in kitchen, sitting room, bedroom, and bath. Since the mansion had been constructed in the last century, the room sizes were very large, and stained glass windows overlooked the street below.

"I was told to mention that there was a mistake on the price in the advertisement."

*Here it comes, thought Brenda.*

"The Departe's will rent this apartment to you for fifty dollars a month. Also, you may have noticed that there is a large Allen organ in the Home. They will allow you to practice on it if you wish. Now, do you have any questions?"

"Only one. Why is this place renting for such a cheap price?"

"Money is of no consequence to the DeParte's. They are only interested in ensuring that the right type of person lives in the Home. That

person has been difficult to find. You are fortunate to have met their requirements: There is only one rule. No men in these rooms, ever! The DeParte's would be furious and not hesitate to evict you immediately. Is that understood?"

"Yes. And as I've said, that's not a problem."

"Good. Then I can tell them you'll be taking the apartment?"

"Yes. All right."

"When will you be moving in?"

"By the end of the week."

"Good. I'm sure the DeParte's will be relieved. Welcome to the Home."

**THE FIRST WEEK AT THE DEPARTE'S WAS LIKE HEAVEN.** With no need to ride on the crowded subway, Brenda was able to sleep an hour longer every morning. But her real pleasure was playing the large organ in the Home's foyer. It was in excellent condition and saved her numerous trips to the University.

The DeParte's seemed to enjoy her music. Often, Roland's wife and Chandler would sit in their overstuffed chairs — never speaking, just watching and listening. Initially, Brenda was distracted, but eventually she got used to their presence.

At the end of her second week, in mid-March, the dream began. The first time, she was upset. The second time, she screamed. As subsequent viewings occurred she tried to figure out what they meant. And the more she thought, the more she worried.

Each dream was the same. She was at a party and dressed in a long black gown. It was in the Home. Everyone was smiling. They were all old. Smiling. Drinking wine. Raising tiny glasses, as though toasting. There was a large red, glowing light. And one young man, handsome, with dark hair and eyes. Big black eyes. He was very close. His eyes. They were shiny. Sparkling. She was lying down. On satin. It was very hot. Light. Dark and black. And they were all shouting something. But she didn't understand. Mai . . . ! Vi . . . ! Del . . . !

And then she would awaken!

She mentioned it to a friend at school who was majoring in psychology. They agreed that it was just a fluke. Nothing to worry about. Her dream was probably a manifestation of some inner anxiety which she had suppressed during her conscious hours. Sleep provided an opportunity for her to release those tensions and the dream was the vehicle which Brenda subconsciously used.

A few days after that conversation the dream was less frequent, then stopped altogether.

EASTER ALWAYS ARRIVED more suddenly than Christmas. Maybe it was because it wasn't on the same date each year and you could never be positive of which Sunday it was going to be until it was very close. So Brenda was surprised for two reasons when Miss Gritts approached her at the Home's organ. It was the Monday before Easter, and she was informed that the DeParte's wanted her to perform at a gathering on Saturday night.

"They have been pleased by your living habits and impressed by your talent at the organ."

Brenda was amazed since her landlords had not spoken two words to her since she arrived nearly a month ago.

"Well it's such short notice . . . ."

"I know it's somewhat late. However, you should be flattered that the DeParte's think so highly of you. It would only be common courtesy for you to agree. After all, they have given you an excellent apartment at a fraction of its real worth. And you have certainly taken full advantage of your organ privileges."

"Do they have any preference as to what I should play?"

Miss Gritts smiled broadly and handed Brenda the music.

"The Mephisto Waltz?" That isn't an organ piece. To be performed properly, it should be done on a piano. And it's not the easiest selection to prepare in less than a week's time. Nor is it very appropriate for an Easter party."

Obviously displeased by Brenda's reaction, Miss Gritts cut in, "The DeParte's and their guests will not care whether it is performed on the piano, organ, or harmonica. It is to be thought of as a ceremonial number. A surprise for the guest of honor. Also, this is not to be considered an 'Easter' party, but a holiday gathering. We do not use the word 'Easter' in the Home, for it might offend some of the guests.

"Finally, they have told me to give you this \$300.00 check for your services."

"I don't want any money. I'll be glad to play . . . ."

Miss Gritts explained, "The DeParte's believe that one does his best when all things are kept on a professional level. If you were to use *their* services, they would expect to be paid, for they are professionals. You should be flattered that they think the same of you. The gathering will begin at nine o'clock. You will be present at the time, even though you will perform later in the evening. The attire is formal. What do you usually wear when you play?"

"A long black skirt and top," replied Brenda.

"Excellent. That will be quite appropriate. We shall see you Satur-

day evening at nine. Any questions?"

"No. Just tell them thank you. And I'll do the best that I can."

"I'm sure you will, my dear. And keep in mind, the people attending this affair are very influential. Who knows what valuable contacts you will make. Oh, and one final item. Please don't tell anyone, at school or anyplace, about the gathering. It's to be a surprise for the guest of honor and we don't want word to slip out. Philadelphia is still a small town in its upper levels of society, and it would be a disaster if the surprise were to be spoiled."

"Well, you don't have to worry. I don't know anyone like that."

"Still," stressed Miss Gritts, "no one is to know. This is a private and secret affair."

"All right. No problem." And as Miss Gritts marched out of the foyer, Brenda began to practice Liszt's "Mephisto Waltz." With nothing to do on Saturday night and no special plans for Easter, the party would help kill another typically dull weekend.

THE FOYER OF THE HOME WAS JAMMED WITH PEOPLE, and the main parlor was beginning to fill. Everyone was well-dressed — the men in tuxedos, the women in evening gowns. At the entrance the DeParte's bedecked in their finery, greeted arriving guests. Brenda was escorted to her landlords by Miss Gritts who placed the young organist between Roland and Chandler.

"You look beautiful this evening, my dear. Doesn't she Roland?" remarked Chandler.

"Yes, ravishing," he replied, licking his lips with a fat tongue that looked like a glob of pink Play Doh.

"Stay with us and greet our friends, dear," ordered Mrs. DeParte, who wore a black silk skirt and a matching top trimmed in red.

By nine-thirty the incoming flow had subsided. Mrs. DeParte took Brenda's arm and introduced her to the guests who were most important. Senators, city officials, corporate executives, recording stars, writers. Everyone who had made it to the top was at the DeParte's.

Interestingly, Brenda was asked the same questions by nearly everyone she met. Her nationality, age, where she was born, and if she had any boyfriends. But Mrs. DeParte brushed away her concerns, explaining that old people had no experience in speaking to the young, and were often at a loss for words. Brenda couldn't help feeling she was being pacified by the older woman's explanation, but she did agree with one thing. All the guests were old. There was no one, except for Miss Gritts, Roland and Mrs. DeParte, under 60, and those

three were close to that age themselves.

Creeping over, with the help of his walking stick, Chandler cut a distinguished figure in his tuxedo. "Is our little pet ready to perform?" he cackled, with one claw resting on his cane and the other on Brenda's shoulder.

"Yes, Mr. DeParte. Whenever you're ready."

"Well, let's say in about five minutes. And, by the way, you are the talk of the gathering, my dear. They all want to know where I discovered you. Imagine what they'll think after they hear you play. They'll just be drooling with envy."

SEATED AT THE ORGAN, Brenda looked over the audience. Because the instrument was in the foyer, only the most important guests were situated where they could see the performance. The rest were able to listen from their places in the adjoining main parlor.

The DeParte's and Miss Gritts sat in the front row and there was an elevated, empty, throne-like chair between Chandler and Roland.

Brenda attacked the Waltz with a passion. She had practiced the entire week, day and night, and she felt well prepared. Even as she approached the most difficult passages her anticipated apprehension never surfaced. It was as if some thing, some force, were driving her to play faster, stronger, and better than she had ever done before. She played as if she were auditioning for an important role. A once in a lifetime opportunity.

She felt sweat on her forehead. Her arms and fingers ached. But she pushed aside the pain, and in its place her mind substituted the pages she had memorized during the last five days and nights.

She was the best. She would show them. They would be pleased. Proud. Excited! And after she touched the final chords, she rested her hands on her lap, lowered her head, and there was silence.

When, a moment later, turned to face her audience, screams of applause and delight roared through the air. They were on their feet, clapping approval.

All except one.

He occupied the throne.

He was young and handsome, and wore a tuxedo and a long black cape. Brenda rose to bow, but her eyes stayed locked on his.

Chandler hobbled over to the organ and called for quiet. Miss Gritts and Roland also motioned to the crowd, which slowly responded. When silence had returned, Chandler spoke.

"My dear, you are excellent. Much better than we could have hoped for. It's been many, many years since we have experienced someone of

your caliber in the Home."

Again, applause rose from the gathering. Tapping his cane he once more signaled for quiet. "My pet. Our guest of honor, Baron Zatanski would like to present you with a gift. A small token of our appreciation."

The Baron, the handsome young man in the tuxedo and black cape, approached Brenda carrying a black velvet bag. Placing his hand inside, he withdrew a long golden necklace, from which dangled a dark, red stone the size of a silver dollar. Holding the clasps of the chain, he placed his hands around her throat and placed the glowing, red ember on her breast.

The crowd applauded. Facing the audience he spoke in a deep, slavic accent. "And now a toast to the young, fair Maiden."

"To our Maiden!" he bellowed.

"To our Maiden!" repeated the gathering.

"And now, my dear," said the Baron, taking her arm, "If you would be so kind as to join me in a private toast."

As they touched glasses, Brenda's eyes again locked with his. She downed her champagne.

For an indeterminate amount of time Brenda walked with the Baron. Then, for some reason, she began to falter, to stumble. But he easily supported her weight. Even so, her arms grew weak and she began to feel very sleepy.

"If I could just lie down for a moment," she pleaded.

"Of course." The Baron lifted her into his arms and carried her across the room. As she passed the grandfather clock in the main parlor, she saw it was one minute before midnight.

Then she saw the young Baron's eyes. Dark, black, handsome eyes. As he placed her on soft, dark red satin, the ember dangling from the necklace around her neck seemed burning. She could feel it against her breasts. It was so hot. So hot.

At midnight the hands of the clock meshed. Chimes tolled:

*One*

Brenda felt so light. So helpless.

*Two!*

The Baron smiled over her.

*Three!*

His teeth glistened. Sharp, Long. Pointed.

*Four!*

His face came close.

*Five!*

She heard them shouting. "Maiden! Maiden!" The Baron's hot

breath warmed her neck.

*Six!*

His teeth were at her throat. She felt a pinch. A snap. The crowd shouted again. "Virgin! Virgin!"

*Seven!*

They raised glasses — small, empty glasses. She saw a tube. A long, thin hose.

*Eight!*

She felt weaker. The hose was near her neck, but she hadn't the strength to lift her hand to push it away. "Maiden! Virgin!"

*Nine!*

Some glasses were full now. Full of dark, red, hot wine. They shouted, "Virgin!" Others called out, "Excellent!"

*Ten!*

Lips glistened with red. Roland's glass was emptied. He licked his lips. "Excellent!"

*Eleven!*

Blackness.

*Twelve!*

"Delicious!" they screamed again and again.

"Delicious!" they all agreed.

Chandler stood arm and arm with the Baron in front of the coffin. Both were smiling as the guests lined up for their portion of the Virgin.

BARON ZATANSKI WAS THE LAST TO LEAVE AT FOUR in the morning, well before sunrise. Rather than being tired the DePartes and Miss Gritts were too excited to sleep.

"A fine gathering, Chandler!" smiled Mrs. DeParte.

"Yes, it was, my dear. And she was an excellent feature, that young girl. I always said California raises a good crop."

"And 1960 was without a doubt, a very good year," added Roland, licking his lips.

"The Baron was very impressed," said Miss Gritts. "He told me to inform you that he is very pleased with the way you handle the gatherings, and he'll definitely be present at your December affair."

"Tremendous," cackled Chandler, tapping his cane with delight. "The Baron above all should appreciate how difficult it is to come up with a virgin in this day and age."

"But you seem to succeed every time," said Roland.

He sighed. "Yes, but it'll be hard to top Brenda. She was, without exception, the best we have ever had at the Home. Don't you agree, Cassandra?"

"I must agree with your completely, Chandler. She was a gathering's dream. Talented. Beautiful. Polite, A *Virgin*. And indescribably delicious! When will you begin to advertise for the December gathering?"

"In light of last night's success, I believe we should begin sooner than usual. We always start in September with the opening of the college season, but this year we'll move it up by a month, to August. Competition is becoming very keen. And we don't want the Baron going elsewhere."

"An excellent idea, Chandler," said Mrs. DeParte. "Now, we have a little surprise for you.

Roland produced a half-pint bottle from the inside of his tuxedo jacket and gave it to Chandler. The label on it read:

PORCELLI'S of California  
1960

"Oh, how delightful," cooed Chandler, tapping his cane with glee and pressing the bottle against his thin, gray lips. "You shouldn't have. But then again . . . Mmm!"

"Well, it's a long, long time from March to December . . ." sang Miss Gritts, smiling.

#### MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Continued from page 5

**ED OKONOWICZ** (*The Easter Gathering*) writes:

I am 33 years old and was born on October 31, which explains why I love Halloween more than Christmas and am obsessed with the occult. I am a part-time writer living in Wilmington, Delaware, 28 miles south of Philadelphia, and I'm working on a novel and a number of short stories which combine horror and humor. "The Easter Gathering" is based on actual events experienced by a close relative who had the "good fortune" to live in an apartment above a family-operated funeral parlor.

*He slipped the remaining razor blades from their plastic casing one by one onto the table top. With the pliers he broke a blade in half, lengthwise, then into shorter pieces. He imbedded a piece vertically into the bottom half of the candy bar . . .*

# NIGHT OF THE GOBLIN

by TALMAGE POWELL

BOBBY PALMED THE PACKET OF RAZOR BLADES and dropped his hand in his pocket as he sidled on toward the candy racks. It was the first time in his eight years he'd stolen anything, and he had the sudden sickening expectancy of sirens and flashing lights.

He dawdled at the tier of small bins holding candy bars while the feverish upsurge of guilty sweat cooled on his forehead. Two other people were in the neighborhood convenience store, a woman paying for a bottle of milk and loaf of bread, and Mr. Pepper, the pleasant old man who clerked in the store.

As the woman went out, Bobby chose a Karmel King, crossed to the counter, and dropped a coin from his damp palm.

"Hi, young fella!" Mr. Pepper, as always, had a warm smile for Bobby. Sometimes, when traffic was slow, they would chat while Bobby sipped a soda pop. The old man seemed forever fascinated, delighted, bemused by Bobby's wit, intelligence, and scope of know-

ledge. Kids nowadays . . . smarter than scientists used to be . . . weaned on moon walks, fourth dimensions, space warps, atomic fission, computers, TV classrooms, nuclear bombs . . . Saganian witchcraft . . .

Bobby supposed that Mr. Pepper had to work because his social security wouldn't keep up with inflation. He wondered what it was like to be old.

"Guess you'll go trick or treat tonight, Bobby."

Bobby nodded, his throat a bit dry. With the razor blades in his pocket, he didn't want to linger in the tall gray presence.

"Halloween ain't what it used to be." Mr. Pepper held Bobby's Karmel King in one hand, Bobby's coin in the other. "When I was a boy Halloween was a kind of street carnival, folks dressing up like spooks and pirates and swarming through the streets of old downtown. You might get your face throwed full of flour, or have somebody drop a paper sack full of water on your head from an upstairs window. Merchants got their store windows all soaped over, and if you didn't take the swing off the front porch you might find it atop a lamp post next morning. It was a night for turning over outhouses and letting the air out of tin lizzie tires — but there weren't the creeps around to drug or poison the stuff dropped in a little child's trick or treat sack."

"Please, sir . . . You don't have to bother putting my Karmel King in a bag." Bobby took the candy bar, and fled.

JETHRO "JET" SIMMONS, LEAD GUITAR with the rock group Iceberg, lately employed six nights weekly at the Asphalt Cowboy Disco, slouched in the recliner and watched the quarterback keep the ball on an option play. The TV commentator explained that it was an option play with the q.b. keeping the ball, which brought a sneer to Jet's thin lips. Bunch of dumb creeps, those sports announcers.

"Hey, Judy," he yelled, dropping the empty beer can on the chair-side table, "make with a brew."

"I just brought you the last one from the fridge," Judy Clark called from a bedroom.

"Be a kitten," Jet called back, "and get us a six-pack. The goons are right in the middle of the second quarter."

Judy appeared in the inner doorway of the small living-dining room. "And I'm up to my elbows in black crepe paper trying to fashion some sort of little-old-man suit, pants and jacket yet, to hang together for one evening."

In their deep sockets, Jet's moody eyes frosted. "Why the hell can't the kid put on a bedsheet and be a ghost, like any normal kid?"

All this crap about turning into a gnome, a goblin for Halloween . . . . ”

“His heart’s set on it, Jet. You know kids at Bobby’s age. Things that don’t matter to grownups can be terribly important to them. He’s a good boy, and Halloween is only one night out of the year. Is it asking so much?”

Who wants to know kids, Jet asked himself tightly, especially the brat by her ex-husband that Judy should have aborted the day after she missed her period. Little fink. No tantrums. No open challenges. Just that glint of wisdom and hatred Jet sometimes caught in the bright brown eyes.

But two can play that game, brat. Pretense and smiles.

While the quarterback threw an incomplete forward pass, Jet stretched, yawned, stood up. He was tall, lean, muscled pantherishly, with a rawboned face framed in shoulder length waves of glossy brown. He washed his hair at least once a day and enjoyed drying and brushing it out. He was equally vain of the flatness of his belly, the leanness of hips in his brushed denims, the biceps that bulged the short sleeves of his black knitted shirt.

“Grab a six-pack at the convenience store during the half-time break,” Judy suggested. Trim, attractive, the emerald softness of her eyes highlighted by the deep auburn of her hair, she worked five days a week as a respiratory therapist in the huge hospital nearby. Robert, her husband, had walked out three years ago. (“Sorry, nothing personal, Judy, just up to here with the marriage bit. You can tell Bobby I went off to the wars, or something.”) Great for the ego. She hadn’t heard from Robert since.

“And while you’re buying the beer,” Judy added, “pick up a Karmel King candy bar. It’s Bobby’s favorite, and it would be nice if you dropped it into his trick or treat bag yourself, Jet.”

Her gaze lingered on the closed door after Jet went out. He had moved into the apartment across the hall two months ago. They’d met a week later, coming into the building, and a thing had quickly developed. Last week Jet had carried his personal belongings, guitar and amplifier, clothing, stereo, tennis racket, barbells across the corridor into her apartment.

Even though the arrangement was acceptable nowadays, Judy had suffered a twinge of conscience, due to a somewhat old-fashioned upbringing and her deep love for Bobby.

A BLOCK AWAY, ED TRAVIS WALKED INTO HIS KITCHEN. In paint-splotched work pants and t-shirt, he had worked up a steamy sweat even though October was closing on a crisp autumn note. He

yanked a paper towel from the holder beside the sink and mopped his craggy face. He was a big, powerful man, feline in his movements in the way of a leopard. A plainclothes detective, he was devoting several off-duty hours to wedge and sledge, bursting down to wood stove size the sawn circular sections of oak tree trunk piled in his backyard. Wheelbarrow load at a time, he was stacking the firewood neatly alongside the garage. Piecemealing the job over the next few weeks he'd have plenty for the winter, and the fuel oil dealer could spit in the tank.

Blonde and slender, so very perfect for his dark heft, Marian was at the kitchen table arranging the punchbowl set as a centerpiece for the trays of Halloween cookies. She glanced over her shoulder, smiling. "I'll bet I know someone who could use something tall and cool and wet."

Marian turned toward the refrigerator, poured an iced tea glass almost full of orange juice, leaving room for a couple of ice cubes and a half-inch of sour mash whiskey.

She handed Ed the finished drink, and he sank onto a kitchen chair with a pleasantly tired grunt. He took a long pull and exhaled gustily. "Now that's a drink for the old woodsman!"

"How's it going?"

"Fine. About another half-cord cut and stacked today. Guess I'll knock off. Have a good, hot bathtub and get ready for dinner. Pot-luck?"

"You know it."

Ed looked at the home-made cookies iced in greens, oranges, blacks. He wondered if he could get away with eating a couple of the little chocolate jack-o-lanterns. Probably. But Marian had the trays so beautifully arranged. He let his stomach rumble, unrequited.

"How many kids you taking trick or treat?"

Marian shrugged. "All that show up by seven thirty. Esther and I invited the eight close by."

"Probably have a dozen," Travis said. "More the merrier. I got some extra nice red delicious for the apple dunking when you bring them back here for the party."

"Ed," Marian said, turning to fill the coffee maker, "why the hell don't you give in and eat some jack-o-lanterns. Plenty more over there on the sideboard."

"You ought to be a parole officer," he said, reaching. "Head off a lot of trouble, way you read impulses in the criminal mind."

"One for me, too," Esther squealed from the doorway. She flashed across the room, climbed upon him, plopped against him. Five years

old, her daddy's dark coloration was in her large, happy eyes and hair that lay in soft ringlets. The rest of her, the grace of limb and lovely piquancy of face, was sheer Marian. Ed's heart lumped pleasurabley every time he looked at her. If the depth of feeling was a little unmanly, the hell with manliness.

"Cookie yourself," Ed said. "Take a bite out of you!"

He growled ferociously, and Esther wriggled, giggling in delight. They tussled and brawled, Ed tickling her ribs and nibbling the back of her tiny neck while she writhed and filled the kitchen with her laughter, and Marian tossed a fond smile their way.

Finally, Esther fell back against his massive arm, looking up at him, gasping through parted lips. "Daddy, I laughed so hard I almost went t-t in my pants!"

"Well, I'm glad you didn't. Very unladylike. You know, mama's been so busy doing for this party, why don't we do something for her?"

Esther half raised. "What, daddy?"

"Go to the fried chicken place and bring back a barrel for dinner. Like a party of our own."

**BOBBY CLEARED A SPOT ON THE SMALL TABLE IN HIS ROOM** by setting his microscope and a box of parts for a half-finished model car temporarily on the floor. He turned on a goose-necked lamp and laid the Karmel King, purchased, and the razor blades, stolen, in the glare.

He tried not to think of the way he'd gotten the blades, while he sat in a straight wooden chair and pulled himself hard against the edge of the table. He picked up the dime store magnifying glass normally used to examine used postage stamps purchased, when affordable, from a dealer's penny-nickle-dime barrel. He laid the Karmel King with the lettered topside of the wrapper against the table, and studied for a moment the way the gold and tan wrapper was folded and sealed.

One of mommy's old tweezers, stamp tongs, lay beside a perf gauge, amid a clutter, orderly to its owner, of stamp sheets, science fiction comic books, and experiments with a little rubber-type printing machine.

Carefully he inserted a tweezer tine under the imperfectly joined folds in the candy bar wrapper. Lower lip pressed between his teeth, he applied gentle pressure. The fold popped loose. Bobby drew a long breath before attacking the wrapper further.

In a few moments, he had opened the wrapper without marring it with a single tear. The Karmel King lay exposed, dark and naked in its skin of chocolate.

He rested briefly; then he picked up the candy with one hand, a razor blade in the other. Face set in intense concentration, he started at a corner and made a thin cut around the thinner perimeter of the candy bar, along the sides and across the ends. Gently. The chocolate must not chip. The cut must be even and straight.

He repeated the cut, deepening the surgery. The Karmel King came apart in two perfect layers. He eased them onto the table, top and bottom, insides facing the ceiling.

Breathing through his mouth, he cuffed sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. So far, perfect. Once the halves were rejoined into a whole candy bar, the perimeter cut could easily be wiped away with a careful stroking of a warm thumb along the chocolate surface. Then back into the undamaged wrapper . . . cautiously preserving the original folds . . . a touch of model airplane glue to reseal . . . And no one could tell by looking at the candy bar that it hadn't just come from the factory.

But before that, prior to the restoration, came the part that Bobby dreaded most.

He set his teeth, snapped his head in a shake, and rummaged his needle-nosed pliers from among the tools in the table drawer, wood carving set, small ballpeen hammer, screwdriver, jackknife.

He slipped the remaining razor blades from their plastic casing one by one onto the table top. With the pliers he broke a blade in half, lengthwise, then into shorter pieces. He embedded a piece vertically into the bottom half of the Karmel King . . . then another . . . another . . . another . . . working tirelessly while the supply of blades dwindled.

"BUBBLE, BUBBLE, TOIL AND TROUBLE," ED TRAVIS BOOMED, flinging open the front door, peering through the eyeholes of a Frankenstein monster mask. "What have we here? A witch with an expired broomstick license and her scary helpers with loaded trick-or-treat sacks."

Eight assorted miniature beings from Star Wars, brothers Grimm and other folklore trooped into the Travis living room, where a paper donkey was hung for the tail-pinning, an armada of apples floated in an old-timey washtub, a white crepe paper ghost danced in mid-air, a candle inside a jack-o'-lantern cut from a real pumpkin shed unreal light and shadows.

There was Timmy Brock as R2D2, little Cara Norman beneath a skeleton costume, Bucky Steadman an obvious Rip Van Winkle, Laurie Jameson as a witch, Junior Roberts a cowboy without his hi-yo Silver. Ed's own Esther was a black kitty-cat, and Bobby Clarke had to

be, Ed supposed, a gnome in the little-old-man black outfit, wrinkles eyebrow-pencilled on his face, a knotted top from a nylon stocking tightly capped on his head to give him the bald look. Chaperoning the group on the trick or treat trek, Marian had ventured forth in commonplace pants suit.

She closed the door as the final child scurried in, looked at Ed's mask and nodded approval. "Quite an improvement."

"Thought you'd like it," Ed said. He slipped the mask off, turned toward the room. "Okay, kids . . ."

Ed looked at Marian and grinned. The witching hour creatures scattered about the Travis living room, more interested in treasure troves right now than in anything Esther's papa had to say. They peered into trick or treat sacks, plunged in their hands, rummaged, popped candies and gum in their mouths.

"Mr. Travis?" said the goblin.

"Yes, Bobby?"

"I've a Karmel King!"

"Great!" Ed smiled at the expression on the gnome face.

Bobby reached up, holding the candy bar. "I would like to share it with Esther."

"Bobby, I'm sure she has more than . . ."

"Please, sir. My treat. You and Mrs. Travis and Esther are so nice . . . this party and all . . ."

The small, extended hand was insistent. Ed laughed. "Sure, Mr. Goblin, I know what you mean."

Ed took the Karmel King and peeled off the wrapper.

"If you break it a little lopsided," the goblin said, "you may give Esther the big half."

Holding the Karmel King between thumbs and fingers, Ed applied mild pressure to pull the semi-soft bar apart. Suddenly he yelped, jerking his left hand free. He stared at the bright, seeping redness on his left thumb, a glowing ruby of blood. The thought seemed foolish, unreal: The candy bar had cut him.

He whirled toward an occasional table and turned on a lamp. In the spill of light, he stretched, pulled, separating the Karmel King carefully. Frowning, Marian stepped to his side. "What is it, Ed?"

He looked up, his face itself a white, vicious Halloween mask. "Razor blades . . . The damned candy . . . Marian, somewhere along the trick or treat route we've got an absolute sonofabitch! Bobby!"

"Yes, sir?" said the gnome, suddenly bewildered, frightened.

Ed bent his knees to put himself on eye-level. "Have you any idea where you got the Karmel King Which house, apartment? Who?"

"Yes, sir," Bobby said. "Jet gave it to me."

"Jet?"

"Jethro Simmons, Mr. Travis. He's mommy's boyfriend."

"I see . . . Bobby, this is very important. You mustn't make a mistake. Are you absolutely sure he gave you the Karmel King."

"You can ask Mrs. Travis," Bobby said. "Jet said that here is your favorite and handed me the Karmel King." It was the moment of crisis, showdown, and Bobby was sweating lightly. His mind sparked with the memory of covertly dropping Jet's Karmel King in a street gutter and slipping the candy he'd prepared into his trick or treat bag.

"That's right, Ed," Marian said tightly. "Bobby is telling the truth."

"Is that the only Karmel King in your bag?" Ed asked, his detective's mind covering all details.

"Yes, sir, I'm sure it is. But you can look."

Ed spilled the contents of the bag on the table, candy kisses, bubble gums, an apple, cookies and lollipops.

Ed lifted his stony eyes. "Marian, get me a piece of aluminum foil to wrap this candy in." He glanced about the room. "Sorry . . . it was to be such a fine party . . . Well, they can still have the games and refreshments. Gather up every bit of this trick or treat stuff . . . I'm going back on duty as of now . . ."

**BOBBY LAY IN THE SILENCE OF HIS ROOM** looking at the softness of moonlight framed in his window. He shifted on his mattress, thinking of the way Mr. Travis had looked as he'd phoned police headquarters and left the house. Wow! Bobby sure wouldn't want Mr. Travis coming after *him* with that kind of look on his face!

But it was all right. Everything had worked out okay. Aside from the little cut on Mr. Travis's thumb, nobody had got hurt, and it was okay. A goblin's goal is to protect his treasure, and the treasure was safe. Mama was upset, of course, but she would shape up. Grownups got over things almost as well as kids.

It was real nice to have mama alone in the very next room once more.

A splintery, thudding sound from outside caused Bobby to rear upright. He swung his bare feet from the bed and padded to the window.

In the driveway just below lay the ruins of Jet's stereo. A dark, lumpish shadow swooped out and down, falling beside the stereo. Jet's clothing. Mama had opened the window and was throwing all of Jet's things out.

When the guitar hit the driveway cement, it emitted a skirling dischord, a ghostly note exactly right for a Halloween midnight.

*He was a remarkable jewel thief, and the secret of his success was simple — and frightening!*

# Sleight of Hand

by RON MONTANA

RANDALL COLEMAN LIFTED THE FISH-SHAPED BRASS DOOR knocker and let it fall against the rough hewn door. It must have been connected to a tape deck because he heard the muffled strains of music from the other side. He shook his head as he admired the low slung Spanish house that rested in the Carmel hills just off Seventeen Mile Drive.

He glanced at the barbered bottle-brush plants that flanked the curved driveway and the manicured lawn. It must run his brother-in-law a fortune to maintain, not to mention what the place cost. But what the hell, he was FBI not IRS, so unless Oscar was smuggling underage girls across a state line it was none of his business if he seemed to live a little beyond his means. He didn't visit him all that much anyway, this being the second time in as many years.

His revery was interrupted by the creaking of the large portal and a sisterly peck on the cheek by the attractive door opener. "Oh, Randy,

what am I going to do with you? You missed the barbecue and the cake." Patricia Ann Coleman — now Braverman — was almost as tall as her brother's six foot one and she wore a white silk cocktail dress like she had been born to the cloth. A lonely wisp of ash blonde hair fell across her forehead and she wiped it back with an impatient hand as she smiled at him. Their features were similar, but his face had taken on the dark craggy lines of maturity while hers still remained smooth and sparkling.

"Wasn't hungry, Pat," Randy said as she shut the door and pulled him by the hand down the long hallway toward the living room patio doors. He hated to be called Randy, but she was his only sister so he let her get away with it. But it still irked him.

"Did Maitland show?" A little more than natural curiosity colored his tone.

"I can't thank you enough, Randy. He's wonderful! He's charmed the matrons and dazzled the kids. Even old grumbling Oscar is taken with him — but, as usual, he's feeling no pain."

"Who? Oscar or my magician?"

"Oscar, silly. But that's not all he's feeling; so you'd better come out and get a drink — you always seem to have a calming effect on him."

RAND GRUNTED AND FOLLOWED HER through the double glass doors onto a patio fronting an area that "backyard" applied to as "large hole" applied to the Grand Canyon. There were a couple dozen adults seated under multi-colored parachute canopies and twice that many children in party clothes lined up in sitting rows on the sunlit grass in front of a small raised stage. On the stage The Great Maitland performed.

Rand let his sister lead him to the rear of the assemblage where a long portable bar had been set up. Against the antique brass and wood Oscar leaned, drink in hand, watching the performance.

On the stage beside the magician stood Rand's ten-year-old nephew, Chris. The boy wore a powder blue leisure suit that was identical to the one his father sported. Victor Maitland was a short, thin, intense man dressed in tie and tails. He waved an arm over his wild mane of hair and then covered Chris with a large drape of satin. Then he yanked it away. The boy stood there wearing a bright red leisure suit and the audience gasped. Maitland smiled and cast the drape again, returning the boy to his original clothing and receiving a massive burst of applause.

"Got to hand it to you, ole buddy," Oscar remarked with a slight

slur. "He's got 'em eating out of his hand."

Rand let his eye play over his brother-in-law and he saw a balding, paunchy forty-five-year old man with pink cheeks and a Santa Claus nose, his face puckered in a perpetual grin. "Pour me a beer, Oscar, and let me enjoy the rest of the show."

ON THE STAGE MAITLAND HANDED A BOX TO A YOUNG GIRL in a pinafore. Taking his top hat off a table, he drew a live white rabbit from it and placed the animal into the open top box. The girl squealed as Maitland dropped a bright orange scarf over the box, muttered a line of incomprehensible jargon and whipped the scarf away. The girl reached into the box and pulled forth a stuffed rabbit which Maitland awarded her with as she left the stage.

Oscar nudged Rand with an elbow as Pat applauded with the rest of the group. "See, what'd I tell you?"

Rand pulled Oscar to one side of the bar and whispered, "Did you do exactly as I asked?"

Oscar frowned. "Sure. You're the cop. But you could at least have told me why I was taking the diamonds out of the wall safe and putting them in my safety deposit box a week before my son's birthday party. God, Pat was fit to be tied when I told her she wouldn't be wearing them today."

"What else did you tell her?"

"Nothing, just like you said. Nobody but you and me knew I took the jewels out."

Rand relaxed a bit. "Good. Believe me, you won't regret it."

RAND HUNG BACK AS THE LAST OF THE PARTY GOERS LEFT the garden. Oscar and Pat were at the front door waving their good-byes as the lanky FBI agent leaned against the side of the bar and watched the man on the stage packing his gear into a large black suitcase that had doubled for his work table. Lighting a cigarette Rand straightened as Maitland looked up in his direction, startled by the flare of the lighter in the approaching dusk. "Good evening, did you enjoy the performance?" the little man asked with the slightest trace of a smile on his thin lips and a pronounced British accent.

"I certainly did, but it wasn't the first time I've caught your act." Maitland narrowed his eyes as if trying to place the tall man as Rand went on, "The party at the Grover Mansion in San Francisco was the first time. Bessie Grover's husband and I had occasion to do business in the past."

"Ah, yes, a very satisfying evening."

"I'll bet," Rand spat under his breath, then aloud, "And the Capana anniversary bash in Millbrea last month. But that one was in the line of duty."

"Well, I'm honored that you would follow the career of a poor magician so closely," Maitland said as he snapped the clasp on the suitcase.

"Two of the largest jewel thefts in years deserves close attention, Mr. Maitland."

The magician lofted his eyebrows. "You have the advantage, sir."

Rand smiled for the first time in a month. "That, sir, is absolutely accurate."

Maitland hefted the case and stepped down to the grass. Rand moved forward, blocking his path. "Rand Coleman, FBI agent in charge of the San Francisco office."

Maitland didn't even blink. He just held out a damp pink hand. "My pleasure."

"You see, friend," Rand continued, ignoring the proffered hand, "besides the jewels in the Campana safe there was a stack of negotiable securities drawn by a New York bank. Technically that put you in my ballpark."

"I beg your pardon?"

Maitland was not crumbling into a quick confession, but then Rand never thought it would be easy.

"The local police put you through a skin search after both robberies, so I won't bother to insult you with the suggestion. But I don't think tonight's take is going to be at all what your expected."

Maitland shook his head in confusion. "I really don't know what you're talking about, Mr. . . . ah . . . Colbert . . ."

Rand laughed, a short coughing bark. "Coleman, but that's all right. You see, Oscar Braverman happens to be a close relative and I had him empty his safe and fill it with stones from his driveway. I have to admit I thought that was a nice touch. Don't you?"

The sides of Maitland's face stiffened visibly. "Then it was you who arranged for me to perform here this evening," he said through barely clenched teeth.

"Bingo. Give the man a stuffed animal." Rand leaned closer and blew a smoke ring at Maitland's face, his eyes turning to fiery slits. "I don't know yet how you do it, little man. I haven't been able to figure out why the safes never have a mark on them or how you determine their locations even when they're concealed, but I know it's you and I intend to dog you until you foul up. You understand that, friend?"

Maitland shook his head in exasperation. "You're being childishly melodramatic, Inspector."

"It's agent."

"Whatever." Maitland stepped back as if by posing some distance between himself and his adversary he might gain a better perspective of the situation. "And how undeniably uncomplicated a man you are. You know, I do believe you're serious."

"Bet on it," Rand growled.

"Can you prove any of these, these baseless accusations?"

"Not yet, but you'll slip up. They always do."

Maitland sighed. "Well, so that your evening shouldn't be a total loss, at least allow me to buy you a drink and we can explore your faulty logic further."

**THE FOG WAS BEGINNING TO ROLL IN**, tracing a lattice work of tattoos across the tinted windshield of the slate grey Chevy as Rand nosed the car into the parking lot on the bay side of Cannery Row. The exterior of the bar resembled the prow and starboard side of an eighteenth century brigantine. Its interior was sparsely populated and the two men took seats at a table overlooking a small and unoccupied dance floor. Rand leaned back against a thick hauser that descended from the ceiling, advancing the shipboard motif that pervaded the place.

Rand ordered a draft beer from the tired looking waitress and Maitland asked for a Chevas Regal. Rand flinched inwardly. That figured; if he busted the man he'd end up with the bar tab. Well, at least he wouldn't have much trouble justifying *that* expense account entry.

The drinks arrived and the FBI man removed a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket. Maitland produced a flaming match from nowhere and held it under the tip of the cigarette, smiling. Rand took the light, leaned back and sighed. "Neat. Not a brilliant trick, but neat. Care to tell me how you did it?"

It was obvious to Rand that Maitland caught the double meaning in his tone. The magician laughed. "With mirrors, inspector."

Rand grimaced and waited for the other man to continue. Maitland shifted nervously under his glare, then finally said, "Beastly weather we're having."

Rand attacked without preamble. "How do you manage to get the combinations in advance?" He had no idea how he was going to crack this hard little nut but maybe his very presence and the visible threat he posed would elicit a confession. He might just get lucky. Hell, it

had been known to happen. "The way I figure it, you got an inside man, an accomplice who's in tight with the families involved. Maybe a butler or disenchanted lover or something."

It was Maitland's turn to sigh. "Come now, Mr. Coleman, don't treat me like a juvenile. That theory is positively paperback."

Rand nodded. He saw that insulting the magician's professionalism would not get him the information he wanted. "Then, tell me . . . how was it accomplished?"

"Assume for a moment," Maitland said as he sipped daintily at his scotch, "assume for a moment that *I am* the guilty party." He winked over the rim of the glass. "Whom have I injured? The gems were replaced by various and sundry prosperous insurance companies and the owners suffer, at worst, a temporary inconvenience, oftentimes coming out ahead in the trade." He pointed a finger under Rand's nose. "There might be some who would intimate, Mr. Coleman, that your time could be better utilized tracking down murderers and bank robbers."

Rand chuckled. "The epitome of the victimless crime, huh? I'm sorry, Maitland, I just can't buy that. But then," he grinned, "you never expected I would, did you?"

Maitland broke into loud laughter. "What if I were to claim it's a bloody bad knock?"

"A what?"

"Ah, what you boys over here refer to as a bum rap, I think."

"Uh uh, friend, I've got you cold." Rand removed a pair of shiny handcuffs from his belt and dangled them under Maitland's nose. He grinned, ". . . ole boy."

Maitland extended his hands. "All right, commander, I'm your man."

Rand withdrew the cuffs. "Somehow I don't think these would do a hell of a lot of good."

Maitland nodded. "I'm kind of sorry it was you that put it together. I was beginning to like you."

Rand rose, one hand resting on the butt of the revolver in his belt holster. "You're not so bad yourself. And if you'd tell me exactly how you pulled it off it'd go much easier for you."

Maitland grinned broadly. "Why, magic, my dear fellow, magic."

THEY STILL HAVEN'T FOUND RAND COLEMAN. His car turned up a couple of days later in a parking lot on Cannery Row. They thought it must have been somebody's idea of a joke — leaving a life-sized stuffed green frog behind the wheel.

*Something was under the bed. Something that wanted to kill her!*

# SPOOKED

by RICHARD LAYMON

SELENE WOKE UP, WONDERING VAGUELY what had disturbed her sleep. She glanced at the lighted face of the alarm clock. Nearly 3 a.m.

If only Alex were here. How could he leave her alone on a night like this — on Halloween, of all nights! He knew very well how nervous she got . . . Well, he would be home tomorrow morning. Only a few hours from now.

Taking a deep breath that seemed to fill her entire body with peaceful weariness, Selene curled up on her side and snuggled her face against the pillow.

Then she heard someone else take a deep breath.

Someone under the bed!

She went rigid.

Couldn't have been, she told herself.

She felt faint, and realized that she was holding her breath. She opened her mouth, eased air out silently, and breathed in. But not much. Too much, and her chest might expand enough to make the bedsprings creak. If the springs should creak . . .

You're acting like a fool, she thought. There is nobody under the bed. Can't be.

A drop of sweat stung her eye. She wanted to wipe it away, but that would require moving her arm. She didn't dare.

Nobody down there. Not enough room. Plenty of room for the suitcases, though. Only yesterday, she'd dragged out one of them for Alex. A man isn't much thicker than a suitcase.

For a terrifying moment, Selene imagined a man on his back directly under her, his pale eyes staring upward.

Knock it off. Go to sleep.

SELENE CLOSED HER EYES, AND ROLLED ONTO HER BACK, and heard a stifled cough beneath her.

She flung the sheet aside, flipped over, and got to her hands and knees in the center of the king-sized bed. Her nightgown stuck to her back with sweat. "Who's down there?" Her voice was a dry gasp. She cleared her throat and said firmly, "I know you're under there. Who are you?"

A long silence answered her question.

"Who?"

A breeze filled the curtain above her. It chilled her wet face. She heard the whisper of a distant car.

"Please! Who's down there?"

From beneath the bed came a single laugh that scurried up her back like a quick, furry spider.

"It isn't you, is it, Alex?"

What on earth made her think it could be Alex? Because he acted so weird before his trip? Because one minute he was gazing into space, the next acting more lovey and considerate than he'd been in years? They say that's a sure sign a husband's having an affair.

Ridiculous!

"That isn't you, is it?" she asked.

Silence.

"Alex?" She began to crawl toward the edge of the mattress, trying to see over its side. In her mind, she saw an arm lash up to grab her. She retreated to the center of the bed.

Then she heard the groan.

Alex never groaned like that. *Nobody* ever groaned like that. Nobody but those demented, shadowy mutes that sometimes hulked down the alleys of her nightmares.

Maybe this is a nightmare.

Don't you *wish*.

A low, whispery voice said, "Se-leeene."

She heard herself whimper.

Her eyes roamed the borders of the mattress. Except for the headboard against the wall, a sea of darkness lay beyond its edges. The bedroom door stood open, but so far away!

If she could reach the door without being overtaken, a long hallway lay beyond it. Then a flight of stairs. And finally the front door, chained against burglars. But maybe, with luck . . . .

She slowly stood up, the mattress giving beneath her feet.

"SELENE!"

**GASPING WITH FRIGHT, SHE LOST HER BALANCE AND FELL** backwards. Her shoulders hit the headboard. Her head knocked the window sill, the curtain fluttering against her cheeks and eyelids.

The window!

A way out! She could climb to safety, avoiding the awful darkness where hands were waiting to snatch her ankles . . . .

But it would be a long fall to the ground.

She remembered Alex's recent advice. "If you're ever trapped up here by a fire or something when I'm out, jump. You might break a leg, but that's a far cry better than the alternative. Besides, the saplings will cushion your fall."

Spinning around, she ripped the curtain off the window and smashed the screen with her fists. It dropped easily away.

She squirmed headfirst through the window. The wooden framework was rough, and full of splinters. One splinter ripped her arm.

"I'LL TEAR YOU UP!!!" the voice shrieked.

She was halfway out, gazing fearfully at the rows of pine saplings far below, when her nightgown snagged on the sill. She tugged at it, couldn't jerk it free. She squirmed and writhed, whimpering, expecting any moment to feel a rough grip on her ankles.

"No!" she cried out. "Oh God, NO!"

**THE NEXT MORNING, ALEX ENTERED THE BEDROOM.** He noticed that the screen was missing from the open window, saw the curtains piled on the bed. And he smiled.

His smile died when he saw the suitcase on the mattress.

He rushed to the window. The rows of saplings below stood upright against the wind. The iron stakes bracing them were green and barely visible, but Selene was not impaled on them.

"Damn," he muttered.

Something had gone terribly wrong.

At the bed, he opened the suitcase. The timer was there. So was the tape recorder. He flicked its switch.

"I'LL TEAR YOU UP!!!"

He gazed at the recorder, stunned. His words. Yes, the very words he'd screamed into the microphone only a few days ago. But not *his* voice — *Selene's*!

Trembling, he turned off the recorder.

Hands gripped his ankle and jerked, smashing his shin against the metal bed frame. He went down. Selene, on her belly, scurried from under the bed with madness in her red eyes and a butcher knife clenched in her teeth.

*It was crazy. All he had was a simple case of food poisoning. What was he doing in the hospital? And who were all these people poking and prodding him?*

# Give Until it Stops Hurting

by C. BRUCE HUNTER

THE DOOR OPENED AND A PAIR OF HORN RIMMED GLASSES peeked sheepishly into the hospital room.

"How do you feel, Dr. Polk?" the face behind the glasses asked.

The body sitting in the bed twisted uncomfortably and scowled, "Dammit, George, how do you think I feel?"

"I just thought I'd look in on you." George came into the room and gently closed the door. "I trust you slept reasonably well."

"That's very considerate of you," the older man grumped. "First you give me food poisoning, then you check to see how much damage you've done. Thanks a lot!"

Polk fidgeted with the sheet and squirmed a little lower into the bed. He waited for some words of conciliation, but George didn't say anything. So he tensed his lips, took a short breath and started again:

"If you've come to apologize, you're wasting your time."

"Oh, I didn't come to apologize," George said. "I was in the hospital this morning to make some final arrangements, and I thought it would be fun to look in on you."

"*Fun?*" Polk snapped. He wanted to make something of that word, but when he tried to sit up the pain in his stomach started to return. Apparently he was still too weak for an argument, so he slumped back into his pillow and sulked. He wasn't going to let that

word go completely unanswered, though.

"By the way, why didn't the food affect you? You ate the same things I did. At least you could have had the decency to get sick, too. Or have you developed an immunity to your own cooking?"

"Oh, it wasn't food poisoning, Dr. Polk," George said as he walked across the room toward the window. He slipped a hand into his jacket and pulled a pack of cigarettes from his shirt pocket.

"And how, might I ask, do you know that?" The old man cocked his head to one side and glared contemptuously at George's back. "You're not a doctor yet, and if you don't start doing better in my class you never will be."

The younger man started to reply, but just then the door opened and a nurse came in. That was good timing, he thought. It would really be a waste of time arguing with the professor at this point. Perhaps it was best not to say anything.

THE NURSE NODDED TO GEORGE AS SHE WALKED AROUND the bed and placed the tray she was carrying on the bedside table. George returned the nod absently while he fumbled in his pocket for his cigarette lighter.

"What's this?" Polk asked.

"Don't panic, Dr. Polk," the nurse said, moistening a cotton swab with alcohol. "I'm just going to give you a shot."

The old professor grimaced and scrunched down into the bed as if he were trying to find a way to disappear. Ignoring his feeble attempts at evasive action, the nurse pushed up the sleeve of his hospital gown and swabbed his arm. Then she took a hypodermic needle from the tray, tapped it with the tip of her fingernail and held it up to squirt a small fountain of colorless liquid into the air.

While she probed for a vein Polk squinted intently at her. His glasses lay on the table, and without them the world came to him as a hazy blur.

He finally asked, "Don't I know you?"

"You should. You gave me a 'D' in chemistry once," she mumbled, probably not loud enough for him to hear. "You almost washed me out of nursing school, you . . ." Just then she located the vein and inserted the needle with more than usual force.

"Ouch!" the professor flinched. "That hurt."

"Good," she said, abruptly pulling out the needle.

He rubbed his arm while she quickly packed up her materials and snatched the tray from the table. She circled the bed again on her way out of the room and, as she passed George, smiled and gave a

quick wink.

He acknowledged the gesture with a wave of his cigarette. Then he slipped his lighter into the side pocket of his jacket and turned to face the window.

"So you've come to apologize," the professor said, trying to remember what they had been talking about before the interruption.

"No," George said. When the short word ended, he kept his lips pursed to exhale a cloud of gray-blue smoke that travelled the short distance to the window and mushroomed on the glass. Then he took a breath and continued, "You have a lot of former students around here, don't you?"

"Yes," Polk said, "and I shouldn't have let some of them through. There's too much incompetence . . ."

"On the contrary. Most of them have gone on to be very successful; doctors, nurses, technicians."

The old man grumped at being interrupted. He wasn't used to such disrespect from his students. George didn't seem to notice, though. He just kept talking.

"A lot of good people have struggled through your classes. And you've given them a lot to remember."

Polk dropped his head back into the pillow and rubbed his eyes with the second finger and thumb of his right hand.

"It's called maintaining standards, George. There's too much sloppy . . ." His words trailed off sleepily.

THE DOOR OPENED AGAIN. This time two orderlies came in wheeling a steel stretcher ahead of them. Its wheels shimmied on the floor, and it collided with the bed as the orderlies maneuvered it awkwardly alongside. The impact jolted the old professor, who strained to open his eyes and peer at the two figures hovering over him.

"Wha's goin' on?" His words were a little slurred.

"Just relax, Dr. Polk," one of the orderlies said. "We're going to prep you for surgery."

That seemed to rouse the old man, and he tried unsuccessfully to sit up.

"Wha'?" he said.

One orderly took his shoulders, and the other slid an arm under his legs. He continued struggling as they lifted him from the bed.

"Put me down!" he yelped. "I only had a case of food poisoning. I don't need surgery."

"Actually, it wasn't food poisoning," George interrupted to repeat the information he had tried to impart earlier.

Polk turned his head and stared at George. The news startled him, and he stopped struggling long enough for the orderlies to get him situated on the stretcher.

"When I had you over for supper last night," George continued, "I slipped a large dose of digitalis into your food. One of the nurses suggested it. The stuff causes the same symptoms as food poisoning, nausea and vomiting, double vision, pain. It turned out to be just right for the purpose."

The professor's gaze hardened. He looked up at the orderlies, but they only smiled back at him.

"Oh, don't expect any help from them," George said. "They're former students of yours, too. And neither of them would have graduated if you'd had anything to do with it. They were only too happy to help us with our little project."

"Pro . . . jec . . ." The anesthesia was taking effect rapidly, and George saw that he didn't have much time.

Maybe it didn't really matter, but somehow he felt it was important to finish the explanation. He walked quickly across the room and crushed his cigarette in an ashtray on the bedside table.

"Right. We've been working on the details for several months — ever since we learned a critical piece of information about you."

Polk opened his eyes and tried to make them focus. He was beginning to understand. Grasping the edge of the stretcher, he tried to get off, but he was too weak. He slumped back and breathed hard, trying to hold onto the last traces of consciousness.

"Wha' ish thish?" he moaned. Forcing out the words seemed to take all the strength he had left. He lay very still and stared at the ceiling.

"All the paper work has been done, and the doctors are waiting for you in the operating room. They asked me to say hello to you, since you'll be unconscious when they see you. They were all students of yours." George nodded to the orderlies. They started pushing the stretcher toward the door.

"It all started," he continued, "when we discovered that you had signed an organ donor card. You'll be glad to know that several people will have longer, healthier lives as a result of your generosity."

Polk tried to call for help, but all he could manage was a faint rasp. George flicked the light switch and followed the stretcher into the hall.

"You see," he said, "if three doctors declare you legally dead, they can transplant your organs all over the place. It'll probably be the first good deed you've ever done. You never were a very giving man, but all that will change in a few minutes."

*It was an ominous prophecy, and it couldn't possibly come true, of course. Yet was it merely coincidence that the conditions started to be fulfilled?*

# THE STONES OF MERYTATEN

by GEOFFREY BUSH

HELLO. THIS IS NANCY STEWART at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with a recorded commentary about "The Stones of Merytaten."

Turn the knob to the right to increase the volume. Turn the knob to the left to decrease the volume. At the conclusion of this repeating tape, please switch it off and return it to the desk in the lobby.

The high, circular, stone tower before you was discovered in the desert a little more than 5 years ago, partially in ruins and almost wholly buried in sand. It has been reconstructed in the Museum courtyard in its original form.

It is built, as you can see, of limestone blocks roughly the size of an adult human being. These blocks are in 5 courses, or rows, which, if complete, would contain 17 blocks each. But 3 blocks are missing — 1 leaving an aperture in the 4th, or next-to-highest course, and 2, in the

1st course, providing an entrance way — making a total of 82 blocks.  
You may now step through the entrance way.

**YOU WILL PROBABLY BE STRUCK BY THE UNUSUAL atmosphere** inside the tower. Everyone who has entered it, even in its earlier, dilapidated state, has remarked on the curious sensation of standing in the half-darkness at the bottom of this deep, round, narrow edifice. Some have spoken of a feeling of fullness, or "possibility," as if they were at a point where invisible forces converged, and "anything could happen." Various explanations have been advanced, from the psychological — that the interior of the tower recalls the experience of birth — to the physical — that inaudible sounds, such as heart beats, are amplified within the tower through some medium other than sound waves. None of the explanations, however, is altogether satisfactory.

Directly in front of you, in a smaller circle of their own, are the 5 upright limestone slabs inscribed with the hieroglyphs that conclude with the famous "curse."

In 1366 B.C., we learn from the hieroglyphs, the Pharaoh Akhenaten and Queen Nefertiti were succeeded by their daughter, Merytaten. In the reliefs that accompany the hieroglyphs, she is depicted, with a grace and expressiveness unequaled in Egyptian art, as a young girl with a strangely elongated head, wide, unearthly eyes, a hauntingly lovely face, and attributes of divinity. She was not a human child, we are told, but "the offspring of the Sun God" — and not the traditional, male Sun God, Aten, but a female Sun God, "older and greater than Aten," who blessed Merytaten's reign with a prosperity "that no other land on earth has ever seen." Her miraculous powers, however, were too much for the jealous, male priests of Aten; after 5 years and 82 days, they seized the young ruler, cut out her tongue, and walled her up alive in a stone wall of her palace.

The hieroglyphs conclude, "When the sun is at the center, and 5 meet 82, and these words are uttered by a voice without a tongue, those who hear them will be turned to stone."

What is the meaning of this ominous prophecy?

What is the sun to be at the center of?

How can 5 meet 82?

Whose is the "voice without a tongue?" How can it utter "these words," and how can anyone "hear" them?

"The Stones of Merytaten" supply no answers. But we can, if we wish, pursue some tantalizing clues.

WE HAVE NOTED THAT MERYTATEN'S SWAY LASTED for 5

years and 82 days. We have seen, too, that her tower is built of 5 courses and — thanks to the absence of 3 blocks — 82 blocks.

Here is something else for mystery buffs: each of the 5 upright, carved slabs has 82 hieroglyphs!

Are these ways in which "5 meets 82"?

What about "the sun" at "the center?"

From the beginning it has been proposed that the circle of 5 slabs, together with the missing block in the next-to-highest course of the tower, may have formed a device for plotting the movements of heavenly bodies — most appropriately, the sun.

Would the rays of the sun, shining through the opening made by the missing building block, at some important moment strike a significant detail of a carved relief? The face of the female Sun God, for example?

Frustratingly, computer calculations produced no conclusive results — until the tower and the 5 carved slabs were disassembled, shipped to the United States, and set up in the Museum courtyard.

Here, at the summer solstice, on the last day that this exhibit is open to the public, the sun's rays, shining through the aperture in the next-to-highest course, will strike a point *precisely at the center of the circle of 5 slabs.*

Which is also the center, needless to say, of the circle of 82 building blocks.

On the day, it so happens, that is 5 years and 82 days after the day when the tower and slabs were discovered.

The sun will be "at the center," and "5" will have met "82" in yet another way.

For — dare we add? — the address of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is 5th Avenue and 82nd Street.

Two conditions of the dire prediction will have been fulfilled.

IS THIS THE PLACE WHERE "THE STONES OF MERETATEN" were destined to be rebuilt? To bring their 3000-year-old curse to pass? If the third and last condition is fulfilled?

If, somehow, the curse is uttered "by a voice without a tongue?"

But that, unfortunately, is an unlikely occurrence. Unless, against all probability, there is a voice without a tongue that can utter a curse.

And now it is time, please, to switch off this repeating tape and return it to the desk in the lobby — thankful that you have not been turned to stone!

Hello. This is Nancy Stewart, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with a —

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# MIKE'S MAIL



## STUCK IN THE MUD?

How delightful, for this reader at least, to get a glimpse of the scalding personalities behind the power of a few pens. Thank you for the invitation to comment on the action. [MSMM, July 1981].

Of course, by her standard, I may not be one of Ms. Linington's fans as I read reviews (and did arch my eyebrows at Mr. Ball's February comments), I buy books by many authors, and I read the mags. Of my own cherished and purchased 600 volumes, the score is Linington 31 — Ball 2. Of books read at the library that have been recommended in reviews scanned in the past three years, I've purchased 4 more by Breen than by Ball, and many not commented upon at all. Mr. Ball, as usual, looks very deep in the background. But please do not despair, sir, for a date with Virgil Tibbs I want an entire uninterrupted evening complete with soft cushions and special lighting. Ms. Linington's circus makes it a pleasure to wait at the dance school, the art school, the dentist — even while waiting to wait . . . .

Demanding only reasonable accuracy in a work of fiction, I am quite satisfied with the L.A. I have come to know and love (although I dislike cats). Keep in mind, please, I must drive 50 miles to Pittsburgh to observe a freeway first-hand. Just what is the procedural importance in the location of the Hall of Justice's smaller courtrooms except for the men desiring to wash their hands? How important is Hollenbeck Precinct unless I plan to surrender? I don't know if I could find my way around L.A. using Ms. Linington's directions. If it is important I'll hire a cab and read en route.

As accuracy is the issue, on page 83 of my copy of *FELONY FILE* (Book Club Edition) the discussion is not about the Hoffman hearing but about Avon Ladies. On page 248 of my copy of *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MYSTERY AND DETECTION* (Steinbrunner

and Penzler) it says: "She [Elizabeth Linington] has admitted that she has no direct knowledge of the methods of the Los Angeles Police Department and that many of her ideas come from true detective magazines." I am not surprised when Lt. Mendoza drives his personal car to the scene of the crime. He is fictionally rich and drives with a poetic license.

Mr. Ball's July chapter and versing of Ms. Linington's work included a discussion of the Miranda warning — perhaps his best recent short work. I'll always be grateful to Ms. Linington for reminding me of the JUST SO STORIES — my young son has added more giggles to his life.

By these authors' standards, I am an oddball reader: am I being held in contempt? There is more than one reason to read, and finding such fault is usually like getting stuck in the mud: one gets mired down chewing the corn cob while everybody else gets to the opera.

Mrs. Susan Streib  
1366 Headlee Avenue  
Morgantown, West Virginia 26505

#### AND IN THIS CORNER: AN L.A.P.D. OFFICER

I have never made a habit of writing to publications to either praise them or complain about real or imagined affronts, but after reading the exchange between Elizabeth Linington and your own John Ball, in your July 81 issue, I felt compelled to take a stand.

As a collector of mystery fiction for the past twenty years and a five year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department, I was taken aback to find that Ms. Linington thinks the police procedures portrayed in her Lt. Luis Mendoza series are realistic and accurate.

I certainly don't wish to take exception here with the success of Ms. Linington's books nor with her abilities as a storyteller, which I'm sure can be attested to by her many fans, but I can't accept that she believes a police officer, no matter what his rank or what department he works for, would drive his personal Ferrari to any crime scene, let alone a homicide.

Can you imagine what the public and the press would make out of one of their public servants driving around in a \$20,000+ car while on the job. They certainly wouldn't stop to consider the fact that he was independently wealthy and if they did they might start to question how he got that way or what he was doing as a cop in the first place (I know his co-workers certainly would).

Aside from the fact that it is against policy to use private vehicles while engaged in official business, it just doesn't make good sense. What malicious street vandal wouldn't love to get a chance to deface a "pigs wheels" and, as Mr. Ball points out, there is many a vengeful hood who would give a lot to obtain an officer's private vehicle license. Unless the officer had taken the proper steps to prevent it, all a villain would have to do is take his \$5.00 and the license number down to the Department Of Motor Vehicles, and he could obtain the officer's home address.

Another point brought up by Mr. Ball which I feel must be reiterated is Ms. Linington's habit of breaking the L.A.P.D. down into precincts. This is only a minor point, but it is a most irritating one. L.A.P.D. is comprised of what are usually referred to as divisions, although this term was made obsolete as of about three years ago when the official terminology was changed to areas, i.e. West Valley Area, Devonshire Area, Rampart Area etc. (there are 18 areas in all).

If Ms. Linington feels that these are not points worth worrying about, maybe she should have created a fictional city and police department based on Los Angeles, as Ed McBain has done in his 87th Precinct novels with Manhattan/Isola; otherwise she should take Mr. Ball up on his invitation to tour the various components of our local criminal justice system with him.

It takes more than just the ability to tell a good story to make a book authentic. I only read halfway through Ms. Linington's book *Felony At Random* before I became so irritated with her errors in police procedure that I had to put it back on the book shelf, where it has remained unfinished ever since.

Again I would like to state that I do not wish to make an enemy of Ms. Linington nor to question her qualifications as an author, but for those of us that are intimately familiar with the daily grind of police work on the streets of L.A. she is way off base.

Paul Bishop  
Los Angeles, CA

### A VOTE FOR MENDOZA

I have never before written back to a reviewer (John Ball), but this time it's too much.

Ms. Linington's Lt. Mendoza books are enjoyable to read!

Who cares where the courtroom is really located? Who cares if Mendoza couldn't drive his Ferrari to the scene of the crime?

If you know anything at all you know even history doesn't have all the facts straight!

I enjoy Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine but also E. Linington/Dell Shannon, too.

Please, Mr. Ball, we read mystery or detective stories to be entertained — not to get smarter!

Jean Ruth  
201 Second Street  
Iron River, MI 49935

*I think you're right, Ruth; the story's the thing, and entertainment is the goal. But there are also readers who want their facts straight, and the entertainment value of a story would not be lessened if some concessions were made to reality, particularly in those instances where it does not detract from the colorful personality of the protagonist.*

*Anybody else want to join the fracas?*



*Got something you'd like to say to Mike, the authors, the editor, the publisher, other readers? Write: Mike's Mail, MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Renown Publications, P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335. Let's hear from you!*

# Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

Ross Thomas, who is one of the steady performers in the espionage field, has produced perhaps his best book in *The Mordida Man*. In a hangover from the Carter administration, the president's brother is kidnapped by a fugitive financier who hopes to trade him for permission to return to the United States. Before long the Libyans get into the act as does an international terrorist who is a thinly disguised "Carlos." This may sound complicated, but the way Thomas tells it, it all comes out as a fast-moving story with a lot of changes of scene and color as the four way battle is joined. Mr. Thomas, who also writes as Oliver Bleeck, knows the suspense field thoroughly and he demonstrates his virtuosity here. The result is a book that weaves present day headlines into some very engaging entertainment. (Simon and Schuster, \$13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

It is time to climb aboard the *Busted Flush* (a houseboat won in a poker game) for another adventure with Travis McGee, who isn't a private eye even though he can often be mistaken for one. At this late date there is no need to point out the superior story telling abilities of John D. MacDonald. This time McGee gets involved with outlaw bikers and the sport of free ballooning. The Travis McGee books are raised far above the usual level for stories of this kind by the talents and capabilities of the author, who is as good as anyone writing today and vastly better than most. This is a worthy addition to a distinguished series that, more and more, is being recognized as literature. McGee is a very believable person and in this instance, he is smart enough to ask for help when he needs it. Highly recommended. (Harper and Row, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

An unusual book, and one that will appeal very strongly to the lovers of the super exotic, is David Case's new offering, *The Third Grave*. It is a quite remarkable mixture that includes a murder mystery, horror, supernatural phenomena, and Egyptology, with a good old mad scientist as a major personality. The writing style, despite all of this material, is a little slow and takes time to come to the point. There is also a girl who never really comes to life, but included is one plot switch that is both unique and remarkable, built around the possible immortality of mummies, that comes as a real and sensational surprise. This is quite a far out book, but if this thing is your meat, then don't miss it. A note needs to be added that in this day of shoddy manufacturing in the book trade, this volume is of exceptional quality: someone is still doing things right. (Arkham House, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Grand Master Aaron Marc Stein, who has more than a hundred books to his credit, offers *A Body for a Buddy* in which his well known Matt Erridge appears once again. This time a college reunion is the scene as a popular playgirl is done in and an investigation begins. The author is always more than competent, but this is not his most distinguished achievement. He is engaging whenever he writes, but his George Bagby series with Inspector Schmidt is more fun. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Although international shipping and the management of the industry is not too compelling a subject on the surface, it certainly becomes so in Thomas Henegé's fine thriller *Death of a Shipowner*. This is an excellent book that takes you from Oslo all the way to Singapore, Hong Kong, and Tokyo, as well as Germany. The author's backgrounds are authentic, and the book ends up a fascinating and highly readable work that holds tightly onto the reader's interest all the way. Obviously the author knows his subject well and what could have been a prosaic setting becomes a literally exciting one. The result is a suspense thriller of the rare kind that should be reread just for its fine quality. The author's name is a pseudonym; it would be rewarding to know who he really is. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

John Lutz will take you over the hurdles in his fine new book *The Shadow Man*. He creates a seemingly impossible situation and builds it to a point of strong tension while the evidence continues to point to something that is impossible to accept. A multi-personalitied maniac is confined in a maximum security institution because of his record as a ruthless killer. This does not prevent him, it seems, from continuing his fiendish work in the body of one or other of his six alternate personalities. A great many people die violently until there are few left to carry the story to its conclusion and to an explanation that is, surprisingly, one that that will leave you more than satisfied. Mr. Lutz has created a tour de force and added to his already sound reputation as a first rate story teller. (Morrow and Company, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The very entertaining writing of Colin Watson has apparently inspired Anthony Oliver to have a go at the same sort of thing in his first novel *The Pew Group*. There is some wit and imagination in Mr. Oliver's work as a piece of valuable antique pottery is kicked about in a church bazaar and then passes from hand to hand as those who know its true value try to cash in, but the flattering imitation of Mr. Watson (what a glorious name for a crime writer!) doesn't come off with the same style and elan. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

When the first biography of Dorothy Sayers appeared under the title *Such a Strange Lady*, there was a general feeling that the definitive work on that subject had yet to appear. Now it has, in a fine and scholarly work simply titled *Dorothy L. Sayers* by James Brabazon. The biography is further enriched by a forward contributed by P.D. James. This is what a biography ought to be. The author knew Miss Sayers personally and he was given access to her private papers by her son, Anthony Fleming. He has written a thoroughly authentic, splendidly presented portrait of this remarkable scholar, author, translator, and writer of Christian Literature as well as the creator of Lord Peter Wimsey, a detective who has taken a firm place with the immortals. This is not a book to read out of a sense of duty, but one to be read for information, knowledge, and entertainment. It rings true on every page and brings back to life a remarkable personality that it is a great pleasure to meet, if only on the printed page. (Scribners, \$14.95) ●

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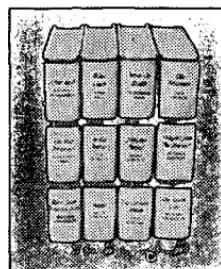
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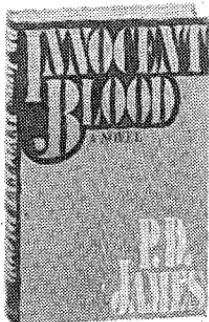
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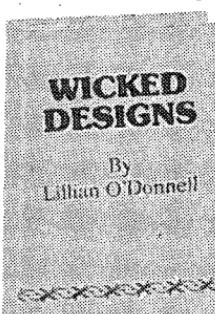
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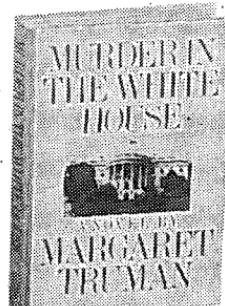
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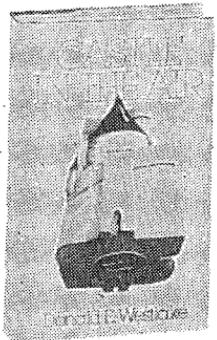
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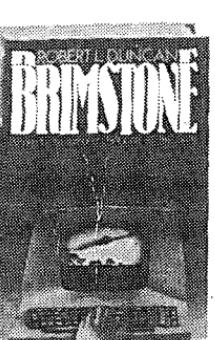
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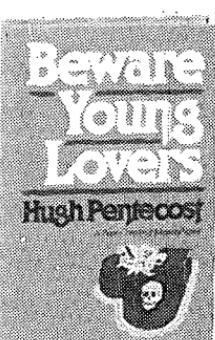
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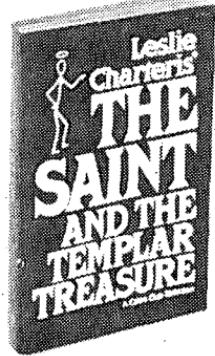
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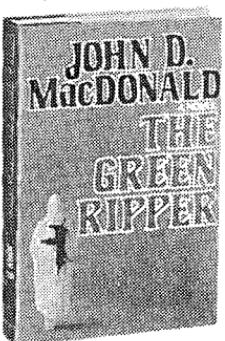
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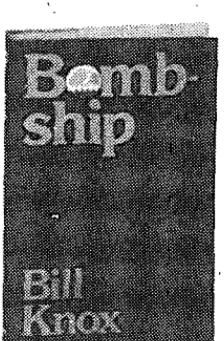
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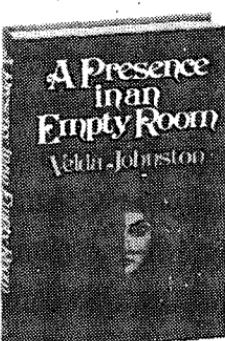
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